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Secondary Headship in the Context of School Autonomy

M Phil in Education

**Awarded 29/05/03
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Abstract

Secondary Headship in the context of School Autonomy

The passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act created the context of school autonomy, including on-site management responsibility and accountability for performance. The intention behind this research project was to explore the impact of this move on the nature of secondary headship. The survey of the literature (chapter one), relating to headship both pre and post 1988, suggested four areas for exploration (later refined as research questions): the nature of headship itself; success in headship; expectations of staff, students, parents and governors; and preparation for and support during headship.

A consideration of the most suitable methods (chapter two) led to the adoption of the case study approach to collect qualitative data that would illuminate understanding of developments in headship. Six heads were interviewed and revisited. Senior staff were interviewed and documents studied to provide supporting or contrasting evidence. The researcher was herself a headteacher and the project was designed to take advantage of her access to heads and be compatible with full time employment.

The data are presented as case study reports in chapter three and answers to the research questions in chapter four. The resulting insights into the nature of headship can be found in chapter five which considers the emerging themes and conclusions.

Headship emerges as a holistic role rather than a series of tasks or activities. Five interlinked themes are seen as encapsulating the nature of headship. These are: scope and complexity; leadership and management of change; the impact of the context; managing dilemmas; and the nature of the head's accountability. The nature of these themes and the way in which they

overlap emphasise the comprehensive and holistic quality of the role and the advanced nature of the required skills, qualities and experience.

Secondary Headship in the context of School Autonomy

During the 1980s a range of legislative measures were introduced to effect change in the maintained education sector. The 1986 Education Act contained, among other provisions, a list of the duties to be performed by headteachers. The 1988 Education Reform Act was remarkable in that it encompassed virtually every aspect of the education service from curriculum and assessment to the funding of schools and quality control, responding to expressions of public disquiet about the accountability and consistency of the state education system. Included in the provisions of the 1988 Act was the delegation of a range of specific responsibilities to schools, including financial and other forms of management. These two pieces of legislation, it could be argued, had the potential to make a considerable impact on the work of headteachers, in terms both of making expectations explicit and increasing responsibilities.

In order to attempt to assess this impact I opted to undertake a research project on a part time basis while continuing to develop my career as a secondary headteacher. Since the passing of the 1988 Act had created a context of school autonomy, including on-site management responsibility and accountability for performance, the purpose of my research project was to explore the impact of this move on the nature of secondary headship. My aims were: to explore the nature and effect of post 1988 changes by gathering data from heads; to extend my own understanding of headship; and to contribute a distinctive perspective from my position as headteacher and researcher.

This thesis represents the outcomes of that research. The first chapter is concerned with the literature survey which informed the identification of the research issues. The second chapter deals with questions of methodology including the reasons for

choosing certain methods, the definition of the research questions and the process of implementation. The third chapter contains the results of the research in the form of case study reports, followed by the fourth chapter which organises the analysis of the data from these case study reports into answers to the research questions. The fifth chapter highlights the implications of these conclusions through the outlining of the themes that emerge. It also summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the research project and its possible applications.

The research issues that were highlighted by the literature survey were: defining the character or nature of headship; heads' success measures; how heads identified and responded to the expectations of key groups, namely staff, pupils, parents and governors; and the appropriate preparation for the role.

Two distinct perspectives on the nature of headship were evident from studying the literature. One was the notion of defining headship as a list of tasks (Lyons 1974) or functions (Jirasinge and Lyons 1996). The other entailed interpreting the impact of external changes on the role taken as a whole, studying the position of the head and the nature of his or her leadership and management (Day *et al* 2000). One significant change that arose from the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act was the increase in accountability for performance at individual school level. There was evidence that heads recognised and, to varying degrees, accepted this accountability (Ribbins and Marland 1994) but that they also specified other distinct challenges and aspirations (Mortimore and Mortimore 1991), arising from their individual situations (Grace 1995). Heads' perceptions of success and, in the context of the publication of league tables and other performance data, the way in which heads measured success, were important topics to explore in order to understand what was shaping their work.

Since the 1988 Act emanated at least in part from public concern about the standards of education in England and Wales, some of the post 1988 studies alluded to the impact on heads

of having to respond to particular expectations (Grace 1995). A later study (Macbeath 1998) defined constituent **groups** to whom heads were **responding**: staff; pupils; parents; and governors. This particular study also underlined the potential for conflicts of interest and dilemmas to arise for the head. The manner in which different heads approached the identification of and response to the expectations of these constituent groups was an area of particular interest that emerged from the literature survey.

A fourth area complemented the three (**nature** of headship, judging **success** in headship, **responding** to expectations). This concerned the **preparation** and **selection** for such a demanding role, including the qualities, skills and capabilities required for headship and the support for heads once appointed, particularly during their early years (Weindling and Earley 1987).

The following chapter devoted to the literature survey explores the sources and the points they raise in more detail. The subsequent methodology chapter illustrates how these issues were translated into research questions which were then explored through the case studies.

Literature Survey - an Introduction

This chapter is devoted to a critical exposition and discussion of the literature that has informed the inception and development of this study. The literature was selected on the following basis:

- the studies were concerned with developments in secondary headship in the maintained sector;
- they were specifically projects involving research into headship in England;
- they relied on a significant proportion of empirical content;
- they provided the opportunity to consider a range of possible methodological approaches;
- and
- a considerable quantity of the empirical content was derived from headteachers themselves.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first encompasses references to the establishment of the system provided for by the 1944 Education Act. This summary is included in order to illustrate some important trends that preceded the passing of the 1988 Act. The second section of this chapter is devoted to a consideration of certain studies of secondary headship that were undertaken and published prior to the passing of the 1988 Act. The third section provides an analysis of the relevant studies that were undertaken and published after the passing of the 1988 Act.

Establishing the system

Structures and policies

The 1944 Education Act established a framework for secondary education which was designed to cater for pupils of all 'ages, abilities and aptitudes' (quoted in Simon 1991, p 73). The structural creation of that system, providing sufficient buildings and staff, preoccupied the subsequent two decades, as Ministry of Education reports testify. For example, a publication entitled 'Education in 1963' (Ministry of Education 1963) contained a section headed **Buildings – Old and New**. The writer reported that 'New schools were coming into use in England at the rate of more than one a day' and that 'The total of new schools built in England and Wales since the war exceeds six thousand, and the number of school places completed is approaching a half of the size of the entire school population'. (Ministry of Education Report 1963, p 1).

At local government level Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were responsible for planning how to cater for pupils of different aptitudes and abilities at the secondary stage. Many decided to embark on the creation of the grammar, technical and secondary modern school combination or tripartite system 'to meet the differences that exist between children'. (Lawson and Silver 1973 p 423). Those differences were established by a selection process based on tests. A few opted to establish multilateral or comprehensive schools: 'The London County Council decided in 1944 on a scheme of partial comprehensive organisation' (Lawson and Silver 1973 p 423).

The system based on grammar and other schools began to attract criticism by the early 1960s. 'The chances of getting a grammar school place in 1959 ranged from the highest 35 per cent in South West England to the lowest 18.9 per cent a few miles to the east in the centre South

of England' (Sanderson 1999, p 77). Doubts were also cast by researchers on the effectiveness of the selection tests, detecting a bias in the English tests towards 'those who had acquired a range of vocabulary and fluency in grammar less from school than from their home backgrounds' (Sanderson 1999, p 78).

Campaigns in favour of the introduction of comprehensive education resulted in the publication by government to LEAs of Circular 10/65. This circular asked for the production of plans to re-organise to provide comprehensive schools so as to cater for the majority of abilities and aptitudes in one institution. It did not actually legislate to require plans for comprehensive education or specify a particular school structure. It did, however, express 'a preference for the all-through eleven to eighteen school' (Simon 1991, p 281), which would provide for most pupils.

The result was that many local authorities implemented, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a schedule of secondary school re-organisation on comprehensive lines. The original post war secondary schools had been modelled on existing institutions, for example independent or grammar schools. These admitted two or three classes per year group thus creating schools of a few hundred students which were 'relatively simple and static' while comprehensive schools, on the other hand, were larger and 'more dynamic and complex' (Lambert 1985 p 4).

From Lambert's personal perspective, it was clear that for the headteacher the 'range of skill has grown extensively if not dramatically since 1960'. In the small school of the 1950s 'pastoral care when it existed was all in the hands of the head or his deputy' and 'the ethos of the school seemed to command a degree of consensus' (Lambert 1985, p 1). Lambert contended that the size and complexity of the comprehensive school placed many additional

demands and expectations on the headteacher. The examples he gave included negotiating with trade unions and managing a range of staff teams.

Public Expectation

In 1944 there had been considerable public pressure for an education system that would help to realise public aspiration for the new welfare state and so 'improve the general standard of living' (National Commission on Education 1993, p 19). By the 1970s comprehensive education was becoming the established norm in many parts of the country. There was evidence from a variety of sources, including academic articles and publications such as the Black Papers, of public uncertainty about the quality of both primary and secondary maintained schools and their capacity to live up to the aspirations later summarised by the National Commission.

This was reflected in the press: 'In 1974 Ronald Butt of *The Times* suddenly launched a ferocious attack on London's comprehensives' (Simon 1991, p 441). This public faltering of confidence was illustrated by events at the William Tyndale School in Islington in 1974-5 (Bush and Kogan 1982). Although they concerned a primary school, the accounts written at the time and afterwards indicate that a total breakdown in confidence had occurred between staff, parents and governors and that the LEA had difficulty in resolving the situation. The then CEO 'acknowledged that the supportive approach was maintained too long'. He recorded of the acting head 'I did my best, personally on the phone to him', and also emphasised that he endeavoured 'to make it clear to him that he had no right to close the school. It wasn't his school to close' (Bush and Kogan 1982 p 64).

This instance affecting one school illustrates a number of features of the system at this stage of its development in terms of public confidence in the system and levels of accountability for

the quality of the service. Expectations of senior staff, heads, LEA officers and governors were unclear. Manchester's CEO wrote in 1979 of 'the almost total lack of agreed grounds on which to assess the health of a college or school' (Bush and Kogan 1982, p 63). Furthermore, there was little regulated clarity about what was to be taught or how it was to be taught. This point was highlighted by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, in a speech delivered at Ruskin College in 1976 (Simon 1991).

The 1988 Act

It took until 1988 for a government to attempt to regulate and therefore reform the system to try to meet these concerns. Two themes were fundamental to the Education Reform Act of 1988:

- The use of direct prescription to define what was to be taught and how it was to be assessed; and
- Reliance on market forces to bring about a situation where schools were to be much more accountable both to government and to parents.

As a result of this, schools became more directly accountable to parents and government, in particular through the introduction of more open enrolment. They were subject to increased prescription in terms of the curriculum but were also given greater managerial freedom and responsibility as a result of the delegation of responsibilities in relation to finance, personnel and site management.

A summary

The 1988 Act arose out of the government's concern about a perceived lack of consistency and public accountability on the part of the education system. Its passing represented a shift from concentrating on building up provision to attempting to regulate the quality of that provision. The 1988 Act was also passed at a time when many secondary schools were becoming large and complex organisations. Secondary heads had been working within this context of growth and development and the next section of this chapter is devoted to a consideration of certain studies of secondary headship which were undertaken and published prior to the passing of the 1988 Act.

Pre 1988 research into secondary headship

Growth and the scope of headship

Commentators who reviewed the work of the secondary head during the 1960s pointed to the increase in the complexity of the role that Lambert was later to chronicle from the perspective of the practitioner. In a collection designed to indicate future trends based on individuals' personal observations (Allen 1968), Edward Boyle's introduction cited four reasons for compiling the collection:

- Growing demands on heads;
- The increase in school size;
- Comprehensive reorganisation; and
- Changes within education resulting from social, economic and technological change.

Edward Boyle was reflecting from his experience of serving as Minister of Education from 1962 to 1964 when the system was expanding rapidly and the demand for comprehensive, and therefore larger, schools was becoming evident (Boyle and Crosland 1971). The various contributors highlighted aspects of these trends.

William Taylor (Allen 1968) commented on the increase in professional and educational demands, the parallel increase in administrative expectations and the challenge of balancing the two. Harry Ree (op. cit. 1968) referred to the evolving tradition of headship as exemplified first by Thring and later by Matthew Arnold. The former was associated with the tradition of the single authority figure whereas the latter contended that three sources of influence governed the job of the head: the governors or providers of the school; the pupils; the parents. According to Ree, Arnold could readily command a consensus about the

expectations of those three audiences, in contrast to the growing public scepticism of the 1960s.

Already a variety of perspectives on headship emerged. These included: the tension between the professional and the administrator; the capacity to command public support; and the increase in complexity and level of demand.

Developments in the nature of the role

Ree went on to describe the head's job as managing the interplay between the demands of these three groups. He observed, therefore, that the head had to be 'listener, encourager, dissuader, reporter, watcher, judge, critic, decision-taker, and on occasions, commander' (Allen 1968, p 116). This diversity of attributes provides a contrast with the picture conjured up by the quote from Thring of Uppingham 'I am supreme here and I brook no interference' (Jennings 1977, p1). Ree and others suggested that undertaking the leadership of groups of people and the associated administrative tasks meant that the role of the head was starting to resemble that of the chief executive of any organisation.

This notion that headship was in transition was explored by Meredydd Hughes (Hughes 1985) whose contention was that there was a duality about leadership in professionally staffed organisations. The head, according to Hughes, was both a *chief executive* and a *leading professional*. His research drew on the experience of a number of practitioners through interviews and surveys. 72 heads and a sample of teaching staff and school governors were interviewed and the analysis highlighted certain key aspects of the head's work. The head as leading professional was responsible for:

- Providing guidance for staff and students;
- Teaching; and
- Representing the school in educational and other professional matters.

The head as chief executive, on the other hand, concentrated on:

- Overseeing the internal organisation of the school;
- Allocating resources; and
- Managing relationships with the governing body and the LEA, including presenting academic and other information.

This division of functions illustrated the impact of increased organisational complexity in the school sector. The separation of the head's role into two main categories provided a definition and a way of understanding the complexity. However, it was also clear that there were areas of overlap between the two groups of functions. For example, Hughes acknowledged that the advice and guidance given to students and staff had to be reflected in the way the school was organised. Equally, the public position taken by the head on an educational issue was bound to affect relations with the LEA and governing body. These findings were based on a substantial body of evidence gathered from heads and others and therefore constituted an influential piece of work which raised further questions and provided insights into the nature of headship that informed a number of later studies.

Developments in the nature of the work

While commentators like Ree and Taylor and researchers like Hughes were considering the potential for complex tensions to arise within the role of the head, other researchers were looking at the nature of the day to day job undertaken by the headteacher. Bernbaum (1976)

questioned 315 heads and produced evidence of patterns of delegation of tasks and heads' views on their own success.

Some tasks, according to the majority of heads who participated, were never delegated, most notably the appointment of staff. Much of the work that was reported as less likely to be delegated, depending on the preference of the head, encompassed staff meetings, dealing with parents and external relations. Purely administrative work like the completion of statistical returns was the most frequently delegated. When asked to evaluate their own performance the heads saw themselves as most successful at selecting staff, handling complaints, dealing with officials from the LEA and enlisting the co-operation of staff and parents. Heads were less positive in asserting that they were effective when trying to improve the performance of staff about whom there were concerns or when endeavouring to persuade staff to change the way a task was performed.

'Heads' Tasks' (Lyons 1974) encompassed a long list of tasks either undertaken by the head directly or supervised by the head. The list ranged from the oversight of pupil welfare and records to responsibility for school budget and capitation and the production of the school timetable. The message that this survey conveyed was that the daily experience of headship resembles an endless and apparently largely unplanned series of disjointed activities. The study was published as a guide to carrying out the work of the head and informed the management training programmes which were established by the Department of Education and Science (DES) during the 1980s. It reflects an instrumental approach to understanding headship in contrast to the study of the total role as undertaken by Hughes.

These studies served to provide evidence of the breadth of the head's work, the capacity for individual heads to vary their priorities, and the relatively small proportion of the work that tended to be delegated at the time the studies were undertaken. The research methods

employed by Hughes were primarily qualitative in that they explored people's perceptions of the situation and presented an understanding of leadership in schools that required further investigation. The studies of the daily work of the heads appeared to rely more heavily on quantitative methods as they attempted to catalogue the volume and nature of heads' activities.

Trying to define headship

Towards the end of the 1970s the DES funded a project lasting for three years and aimed at trying to define at least one aspect of understanding and managing headship (Morgan and Hall 1982). The focus was the selection procedures used to appoint secondary school headteachers. The study began with an attempt to define headship.

The researchers observed that at the turn of the twentieth century the head's power had been absolute but that by the 1980s the head was more accountable, partly as a result of some legislative changes, for example the powers given to school governors by the 1981 Education Act. Changes in school size and organisation and public expectation also meant that the head was not able to assume a capacity to 'promote policies without contest' (Morgan *et al* 1983, p 11). The research team concluded, after talking to LEA officers, that heads were still nevertheless regarded as critical to the effective running of the school. Nevertheless, the majority of LEAs did not have in place a job description for the headteacher. This prompted a job analysis based on existing work on analysing chief executive managerial roles in a variety of contexts and on Lyons' work on Heads' Tasks.

Four categories of responsibility were identified as a result:

- Technical, including curriculum planning;
- Conceptual, including planning and organising;
- Human relations, including staff development; and
- External relations, including accountability to governors and the LEA.

These categories were used to analyse data gathered from around the country concerning selection procedures used for appointing heads. The work of the secondary head was defined by grouping tasks into these four categories. For example, 'Technical' included establishing school aims, ensuring that the necessary academic and pastoral curricula were in place to achieve those aims and allocating the required resources.

As a way of verifying the validity of these four categories and the areas of activity attributed to each, interviews were also undertaken by three heads with a range of colleagues. All three identified a core of tasks similar to those discovered through the main research. Additional aspects that were identified included coping with the pressure of the job, particularly when new in post, and developing senior staff teams to mitigate the breadth of the post.

The original aim of this study had been to encourage consistency in the practice of appointing headteachers. However, this had assumed some sort of working agreement as to what was expected of the head. In the event, the research actually produced a possible definition of headship, resulting from bringing together findings from previous studies and the outcomes of interviews with heads. At this particular point, however, the government was preoccupied with pre 1988 attempts to prescribe the curriculum and extend parents' rights to choose schools for their children (Simon 1991).

Headteachers at Work

Another research project, published by the same team that undertook the above study, sought to clarify the nature of headship and so set out to discover what could be gleaned from detailed observation of headteachers at work (Hall *et al* 1986). The substantive project involved observing four individual heads at work on a day to day basis, adopting a form of ethnographic approach, thus providing a wealth of data about a small number of subjects. In this project there is an instrumental aspect in that tasks and activities are observed. There is also the overall objective to understand and explain the nature of the role of the head, based on the data from the four heads.

As preparation for the work the research team followed fifteen heads for a day and concluded that the working day of the head was fragmented, people intensive and encompassing a vast range of tasks (Hall *et al* 1986). In its largely unplanned nature, the picture of the working day was similar to that which had emerged from work on heads' tasks (Lyons 1974). This impression provided the background to the detailed observation of the four heads as they discharged their duties at their schools.

The most striking features of the findings were the quantity of empirical data about each head and the marked differences between each head. The head who was given the name Mr King was described as determined to be highly visible and in command, centralising the decision making, dealing directly with students and expecting staff to follow his example rather than any written rules. Mr King, according to the account, worked closely with senior officers within the LEA and made community relations a major priority in his day to day work.

The head referred to as Mr Mercer was alluded to as visible in assemblies and on tours of the school while at other times he seemed to be relatively inaccessible, only to be reached through his secretary. He was said to be somewhat autocratic in style, saying that he did not believe that the staff were in a position to make helpful contributions to decision making. He was seen to spend time on routine tasks and leave time for responding to occurrences rather than planning ahead; his approach was termed 'ad hoc'. He came over, according to the research report, as business-like, a person who gave time to administration and wanted parents and others to trust what he saw as the traditional strengths of the school.

Mr Dowe, the third head, was portrayed as concentrating on academic matters, coming across as the head who saw himself as the leading teacher. He concentrated on teaching sixth formers and on examination performance at this level and particularly in his subject area. He delegated extensively and 'sought to demonstrate through his own professional competence as a teacher ways in which he wanted staff to see their own teaching roles' (Hall *et al* 1986, p 210). He was also said to rely on 'heads of department to evaluate and monitor staff' (*ibid.* p 78). Mr Dowe was also described as being more participatory in style than Mr King or Mr Mercer. Furthermore, he was seen as more school focussed, certainly than Mr King, in that he made little attempt to see LEA officers or other heads.

The fourth head was known as Mr Shaw and was the only one of the four who was portrayed as taking a more systematic and proactive approach to his day. He was referred to as constructing a plan to ensure that he played some part in the 'whole range of the school's activity' (Hall *et al* 1986, p 211). He systematically created and sustained mechanisms for maintaining his relationships with the various groups in the school thus working to enable staff to be involved in planning and decision making. His methods included emphasising a close working relationship with his senior staff. He was observed, like all the other heads, as having to respond to the unexpected but he appeared to absorb this demand into a day that the

researchers perceived to be 'organised, punctuated by regular events, with no gaps and considerable momentum' (Hall *et al* 1986, p 211).

A number of interesting features emerge from this study. All four heads appeared to identify their own day to day priorities and interpret both the role and the nature of the work differently. Mr King seemed to be primarily a pastoral leader in the way he dealt directly with students rather than concentrating on examination results or work in the classroom. Mr Dowe was concerned with pedagogy in as much as he liked to lead by example while Mr Mercer's priority seemed to be to keep overall control so as to ensure that everyone concentrated on their work. Mr Shaw came the closest to an attempt to be both the strategic leader of the organisation or chief executive (Hughes 1985) and the leading professional within the school.

There had been, by the 1980s, a number of government publications endeavouring to identify the features of a good school, for example 'Ten Good Schools' (Department of Education and Science 1986). Yet there is no sense from these four heads that they drew on external definitions of good schooling to inform their work or establish their priorities. Only Mr King was seen visiting lessons, the researchers 'never saw Mr Dowe (despite the way he came across to researchers as a leading teacher), Mr Shaw or Mr Mercer monitor staff performance' (Hall *et al* 1986, p 76). There was no published job description for the secondary head in the maintained sector at this stage and this study suggests that there were many very different interpretations of the role. Despite the researchers' earlier conclusion that heads were more accountable in the 1980s than in the 1880s, (Morgan *et al* 1983) these heads seemed to be in a position to choose their own accountabilities and priorities.

Understanding heads and schools

The National Foundation for Education (NFER) commissioned a study to provide an understanding of the early years of headship (Weindling and Earley 1987). The purpose of this research was to create an understanding of how heads could create good schools and how they could be prepared and supported in order to ensure they were successful. The introduction to this piece of research draws together a number of the projects and themes that have previously been outlined in this account. In addition, space is devoted to characteristics of good or effective schools, garnered from a range of research projects reviewed by Rutter (1987) and Purkey and Smith (1987). These characteristics included: an academic emphasis; high quality classroom management; good order and discipline; positive leadership from the head; clear goals; whole staff development; LEA support and parental involvement. This study effectively brings together the complexity and nature of the job and the expectation that the head will make the school more effective.

The research itself involved three groups of subjects: newly appointed secondary heads; heads with three to eight years' experience; senior officers from the sixteen LEAs represented by the newly appointed heads and all LEAs via a questionnaire asking about support and training for senior staff in schools. The sixteen heads and LEAs were chosen through a process of initial questionnaires, interviews and visits. Four of the more experienced heads were chosen, after a questionnaire and case study, for a detailed study of how they managed change. The range of methods used represented a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches, balancing volume (staff in the schools, all LEAs) with depth (sixteen new heads over several years).

There were many sets of findings enshrined in this study and the researchers made a number of practical recommendations. One theme that emerged strongly was the importance of building effective senior staff teams. The implication here is that the scope of school leadership and management was sufficiently complex to require the team approach. The stress was on the need to plan the work and development of the team and on the fact that the head has to delegate responsibilities as well as tasks. There is a contrast here not only with the earlier reference to limited delegation (Bernbaum 1976) but also with some of the practice reflected in *Headteachers at Work* (Hall *et al* 1986).

Another powerful insight was the emphasis placed on bringing about change. The majority of the heads considered that bringing about change during the first years in post was a necessity. The inference is that the head is appointed to improve the school and in turn this implies areas that might require improvement. A wide diversity of changes was indicated, many of them organisational, for example the construction of a faculty system, or curricular, like the introduction of a new course. The analysis of heads' comments on managing the process of change highlighted another finding from this study. This was the necessity of nurturing good relations with all staff in order to generate the climate for effective innovation.

A central purpose of this study was to make recommendations about preparation, training and support for new heads. These included the suggestion that deputies should have as much experience of the work of the head as possible and a plea to LEAs to provide specifically relevant courses for senior staff and induction and ongoing support for heads. In this study heads' feelings of professional isolation resulting from the nature of the post and the responsibility were attributed to 'the majority' (Weindling and Earley 1987 p121). This illustrates the way in which heads were both creating teamwork in school and experiencing loneliness and pressure and the need for professional support from those who were outside the school and therefore not accountable to the head.

This study also highlighted some of the contradictory expectations of the head. Staff talked both of wanting to be involved in decision-making by a communicative and friendly head and of wanting to be provided with firm leadership. Staff expected a new head to make changes and yet they were also likely to fear and resist some changes. Some staff had particularly high expectations of a new head and were doomed to disappointment, either because they were being unrealistic or because the head had different priorities for improvement.

Weindling and Earley (1987) were the first to focus so specifically on the need to prepare heads to institute, lead and manage change. It also provided the most overt consideration of the link between the head's work and the notion of a good school. There is an implied definition of headship in terms of staff teamwork, change management, school improvement and external relations. Their study is valuable because of the volume of data, the mixture of methods and the way that it includes research into headship undertaken prior to the passing of the 1988 Act, illustrating how illuminating a combination of evidence from other projects and newly collected data can be.

The following section is concerned with studies dating from the period following the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act. This section has considered the empirically based studies of headship that deal with the growing range and complexity of demands and the move towards a definition of headship and by implication a definition of the head's accountability. The next section develops these themes in the light of the impact of the 1986 and 1988 Acts that provided an element of clarification of the job of the head and through legislation and regulation set some standards for the education service.

Post 1988 research into secondary headship

Researchers studying 'Headteachers at Work' (Hall *et al* 1986) concluded that the lack of a contractual definition of headship led to considerable variation in practice between heads. The 1986 Education Act contained a list of duties for heads which are summarised as: defining aims and objectives; management and organisation of the school; curriculum development; discipline and welfare of pupils; record keeping; external relations; and monitoring of staff and school performance.

The 1988 Education Reform Act made schools accountable for what was taught through the specification of a national curriculum and assessment regime. It also stipulated the delegation of certain financial and personnel management functions to individual schools. 'Alongside this centralisation of curricula and assessment, the Act placed the principle of decentralised management. Schools were to be free to manage their own development funded by a formula based on objective criteria, the chief variable in which was pupil numbers' (Wallace 1993, p2). This move to on-site management added to the head's job 'the tasks of liaising with the governing body (of which the head is usually a member) over its new role in respect of the delegated budget, its power to appoint and discipline staff' (Mortimore and Mortimore 1991, p viii). The same piece of legislation also provided for an increase in the open enrolment of pupils to encourage competition between schools, thus creating within the education system a 'market' element (National Commission on Education 1993, p28).

The National Commission summarised the 1988 Act as a twin pronged approach to calling schools to account. Product control standards (curriculum prescription) were introduced alongside the element of consumer demand (more open enrolment coupled with pupil-led funding for schools). Subsequent legislation established the publication of schools' examination results, leading to the introduction of school performance league tables. This

move was intended to inform consumer choice and therefore link together school standards, student recruitment and school budgets. It was an attempt to define a public accountability culture within which schools – and by implication heads - would operate.

The survey of the studies of headship published prior to the passing of the 1988 Act indicated that the work identified accumulating pressures and demands on headteachers. These accumulating pressures and demands resulted from the way the role was moving from being ‘traditional autonomous, paternalistic’ (Day *et al* 2000, p8) to involving school leadership and change management in the context of increasing public accountability (Weindling and Earley 1987). The 1988 and subsequent legislation formalised and specified the way in which the system was to operate in this context. The research studies that followed tended to focus on the impact of the provisions of the 1988 Act on the way the school system operated. In some cases this included investigating the impact of the measures on the work of the secondary head.

The studies that were selected provided insights into the work of the secondary head after the passing of the 1988 Act and drew their conclusions from data derived from heads’ own experiences. They fall into four categories: heads talking about their work; research into the head’s leadership in the wider context of the school system; competencies and headship; and recent investigations into the nature of school leadership.

Heads talking about their work

One study was undertaken particularly ‘to enable headteachers to speak for themselves’ (Mortimore and Mortimore 1991, p vii). Responses were sought from eight heads on topics that included: own background; personal philosophy; school organisation and management; organisation and management of learning; and relationships and personal reflections. The

editors presented the data in the form of a chapter devoted to each individual head and a concluding summary of the emerging issues. Seven of the schools were located in England, one in Canada. All were secondary comprehensive schools.

A striking feature of the study was the diversity of approaches and priorities among the heads, echoing Hall *et al* (1986). In terms of individual histories, they varied greatly. One head had arrived in England from abroad with experience and qualifications in education but had to work in a factory before securing a post in a school while another head had started his career in a grammar school. In terms of personal philosophy, one head spoke of uncertainty about the value of the educational institution, another about running schools like small villages while a third talked of the importance of preparing pupils to take their place in society.

Each individual head established particular priorities depending on the context of the school and his/her personal perspective. One referred to the importance of encouraging Muslim parents to relax some of the restrictions imposed on their daughters so as to help them take full advantage of the opportunities that the school was providing for them. Another talked of involving parents in school policy-making by including them in discussions of 'issues of substance' (Mortimore and Mortimore 1991, p 158). One head was keen to develop community links for a school whose intake came from all over a large city.

These responses were gathered during the period immediately following the passing of the 1988 Act. The heads had already established working patterns that would reflect pre 1988 practices. The summary section did indicate some developments prompted by the provisions of the 1988 Act. Many of the heads talked of the impact of financial delegation. They welcomed the increased flexibility but were concerned about the amount of time taken by financial management. Some also talked of financial difficulties resulting from Local

Management of Schools (LMS), for example, the requirement to charge community users and the subsequent adverse impact on community work in the school.

One head referred to the need to share work and delegate more as a result of the increased workload. Several talked about the challenges arising from creating and sustaining teams of staff who carried significant responsibilities. Some alluded to deciding how best to exercise leadership in order to involve staff and achieve results, referring to the need to deploy a wide range of styles when making and communicating decisions. Another common theme was the value of actively nurturing the confidence of the school's community through work with parents, local businesses and through maintaining a healthy level of student recruitment. Overall, this study was rich in data about the work of individual heads. The parallel themes were: the difference made by the individual context of the school; the heads' common anxieties about the additional work and pressure resulting from financial delegation; and the potential problems likely to be caused by open enrolment.

Another study that concentrated principally on heads talking about their work consisted of detailed interviews with seven heads (Ribbins and Marland 1994). Its purpose was to look at how headship was developing, at 'the role of the head as an interpreter and enactor of change' (Ribbins and Marland 1994, p7). Seven heads agreed to take part in face-to-face interviews informed by a prepared schedule of questions. They had the opportunity to comment on the transcripts and some were interviewed a second time. Much of the published material was in the form of edited transcripts of the interviews. There was also some brief overview analysis based on two themes: preparation for headship; and what was termed 'professing' headship, an expression used by the researchers to indicate the most significant areas of responsibility cited by the respondents.

The evidence used in the overview consisted of anecdotes from the interviews and once again illustrated how diverse heads were as a group. Personal backgrounds, education and career paths were varied. Differences included, in one case, not having served as a deputy. Some heads had undertaken advanced postgraduate study, or benefited from experience outside education or from other parts of the school system, for example Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Views and concerns about 'professing headship' centred on local management, staff leadership, educational matters in terms of curriculum and pastoral care and relations with the governing body and the community. All were involved in financial management as a significant activity. They were seeking to clarify their expectations of the LEA in a situation where schools carried more responsibility. Staff leadership was perceived by all the heads to be a critical area since students would not be cared for or achieve if the staff were not properly led. Individual heads were variously reported as depicting themselves as both a 'shaping force' and 'concerned with empowering other people' or as saying that the head's role in part was to 'identify and train future leaders of schools' (ibid., p28).

These heads all, in different ways, said that they accepted their accountability as leaders and were aware of the importance of building good relationships with staff, governors and the community. This study was similar to the one undertaken by Mortimore and Mortimore in that it depended on the personal accounts of heads and highlighted the differences in persona and approach. It was published three years after the work by Mortimore and Mortimore (1991) and the data illustrated the way the provisions of the 1988 Act played a greater part in the work of the heads and the way they thought about that work. This was particularly noticeable in the way that they embraced financial and local management, talked of proactivity in their dealings with the LEA and described how they led and managed staff bearing in mind their accountability to parents and governors.

The methodology and analysis of this study provided a structure for interpretation that consisted of an introduction, the use of common questions and a brief overview of the outcomes. Much of the detail is in the individual interview transcripts, presented subject by subject and therefore a detailed picture of headship as such does not emerge, rather seven experiences of headship were described. As the heads responded to the interviewers they were talking in turn about: their work in terms of day to day tasks; their job in terms of defined responsibilities; and their roles as headteachers. These related to: their position in the organisation as it affected relationships with a whole range of people inside and outside the school; the styles of leadership and management adopted; and the associated behaviours needed to bring about school improvement through school management (Glatter *et al* 1988).

Research into the head's leadership in the wider context of the school system

The senior management team

The second type of study that provided insights into what was happening to headship focussed on headship as a result of changes in the way the school system operated. Changes in the nature of overall school leadership and management were explored in the following study. 'The multiplicity of management tasks implicit in the reforms of the past decade put heavy pressure on heads to delegate' (Wallace and Hall 1994 p9). This study considered the nature of senior management teams in the post 1988 era, concentrating on in-depth research in a small number of schools. Two local authority areas were selected and three schools in each LEA were the subject of case studies designed to discover current practice using interviews and observations. These were followed by a longitudinal case study over the academic year 1991/2, involving two of the schools. The data were reported and analysed from a number of perspectives. These included: an examination of the roles and insights of individual

participants; the place of the senior management team (SMT) in the whole school; and the workings of each team studied as a whole. (Wallace and Hall 1994).

Some findings were particularly pertinent to an understanding of the work and role of the head. For example, in order to create a team to take responsibility for work that might otherwise fall to the head, she/he had to be clear about the application of the professional hierarchy or the fact that the head takes ultimate responsibility. This included a consideration of how to manage the external accountability for work that was shared or delegated. A school only had one head and that head was, in hierarchical terms, above everyone else. The establishment of an effective senior management team required commitment and understanding from the head and the ability to manage hierarchical relationships flexibly. Some heads were seen as constraining their teams and not allowing them to flourish because of this issue of external accountability.

Successful management teams were, therefore, discovered to be those that were led by heads who could take risks and allow others to take major responsibilities. The head had to work and plan to develop an effective senior team. A head required knowledge and understanding of how teams worked and how best to play to everyone's strengths. One feature that emerged was the importance of establishing ground rules for the team and therefore being clear about ways of working and how individuals could operate and contribute (Wallace and Hall 1994). This study illustrated how, as a result of the increase in on-site responsibilities for schools and therefore heads, the leadership of management teams had become a significant part of the head's work. Furthermore, the senior management team was becoming an important part of the school system.

Entrepreneurial leadership and market forces

The headteacher or school leader, according to the evidence from this and subsequent studies, was responsible for: managing finances, resources and personnel matters; competing for clients; ensuring the publication of results; and promoting the quality of the teamwork designed to produce these outcomes. Underlying all these features was the notion that the accountability of the school leader was secured through exposure to market forces. A study of the impact of market forces on school leadership (Grace 1995) was based on the views of eighty eight heads obtained through interviews, comments on the analysis of the interviews and written responses to surveys carried out as a result of the interviews.

From the responses three broad positions emerged. The *headteacher-managers* saw their role as primarily managerial, believing that effective management would have a positive impact on teacher professionalism and so raise standards of education. The *headteacher-professionals* feared that the stress on management and market forces would weaken professional values (taking a personal lead in teaching and curriculum development) but, in some cases, were also prepared to work for a compromise between the managerial and professional approaches. *Headteacher-resistors* (a smaller number) opposed the legislative changes, particularly the compulsory curriculum.

This study considered school leadership from cultural and practical perspectives. School leaders were responsible for defining the purpose and climate of the institution, including taking decisions about promoting certain values. This study was an examination of the impact on the head's leadership of having to respond to market forces, of adopting the role of entrepreneur or leader responsible for the success of the school as a business. The dilemma between being chief educator and chief executive was evident in some of the responses. The question that was of greatest interest to Grace was the impact of entrepreneurialism on the moral, ethical and transformational nature of school leadership. His conclusions included a

call to serving heads to take some responsibility for and play an active part in the debate about the future of educational leadership.

There was also the potential for contradiction between, for example, promoting community based values and pursuing self interest in relation to student recruitment. According to one head 'I am realistic to know that this spirit of co-operation is fragile and likely to disappear if one of the schools in the area begins to fear closure because of falling rolls' (Grace 1995, p 135). Heads were also asked about the reduction in their influence as leaders of the curriculum. Some perceived it as an advantage stressing that they could concentrate on exacting more specific standards from Heads of Department who were now seen as primarily responsible for curriculum development. This meant that their own leadership could be exercised to ensure overall school effectiveness through quality control of staff.

The data for this study were gathered from a mixture of primary and secondary heads. The study represented the views of a limited sample of secondary headteachers, therefore. However, Grace indicated that he intended to provide illumination not proof. This signified that the research would generate insights for further consideration. The evidence base was sufficient to enlighten and was used by the author to generate his analysis of how the respondents were reacting to the provisions of the 1988 Act. Although heads' views were an important part of the study they were grouped rather than explored individually.

Competencies and Headship

Some studies of headship concentrated on the tasks involved, for example, Lyons' work on Heads' Tasks (1974). Other researchers, like Hughes (1985) depicted headship as a role with a number of interrelated facets. The studies of headship that were derived from heads talking about their work tended to include both lists of tasks and descriptions of the role. The studies that were concerned with the head's leadership in the wider context of either the senior management team or the educational market place were more concerned with the nature of the role. Whether the job is analysed in terms of the tasks or the role as a whole, the post 1988 studies all reflect an increase in the range and complexity of the demands placed on heads. The existence of a contractual definition of headship, combined with the panoply of accountabilities provided for in the 1988 Education Reform Act, led to the consideration on the part of government and others as to the skills, qualities, competencies and qualifications that might be deemed necessary for success in headship.

A study was made of ways of assessing candidates for headship against objective criteria (Jirasinge and Lyons 1996). Initially the researchers used a sample of 225 heads who were asked to complete two questionnaires: the Work Profiling System which contained questions about tasks in context; and the Occupational Personality Questionnaire which consisted of inquiries about behaviour and ways of working. The results of these surveys were studied with a smaller group of heads and the emerging competencies compared with other methods of competency-led assessment.

This process of comparison illustrated the way in which the application of a competency-led approach could vary. If the integrated model was adopted then an individual's success was based upon the compatibility between the job description, organisational context and his or her own traits and abilities (Boyatzis 1982). The occupational standards model was based

upon defined tasks leading to externally verified outcomes and tangible results against previously determined standards (Esp 1993). The job analysis process described in Jirasinge and Lyons (1996) derived some characteristics from both of these sets of practices. The study also referred to the fact that some research had been undertaken previously to attempt to use competencies as a means of defining and assessing professional standards for teachers (Earley 1996).

The task oriented definition of headship has been favoured by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and provided the basis for the first version of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). This qualification was designed to demonstrate that candidates were ready for headship as a result of being assessed against national standards. They had to show that they possessed certain knowledge, skills and attributes. Examples included: the ability to use the appropriate leadership styles to manage change or plan and organise; the ability to make decisions based on analysis, interpretation and understanding of relevant data and information; and the possession of energy, vigour and perseverance (Teacher Training Agency 1998). Other TTA programmes did not rely so heavily on the occupational standards approach and the NPQH was then subject to a revision.

This work on competencies provided further illustration of the complexity and range of headship and the different ways in which the job could be interpreted. The question still remained: should the job be defined by the tasks and assessed against the outcomes or is the role a holistic one with a series of different kinds of outcomes including the display of certain behaviours? Or is it more helpful to depict the job as a balance between the two? Cave and Wilkinson (1992) undertook a research project into the management capabilities required of heads across the sectors. While this work was not just focused on the secondary sector, there were two outcomes of interest in relation to this project. One was the use of the conversations between heads – and therefore a very strong reliance on heads' voices- as a means of

gathering data. The second was the emergence of what are termed 'higher order capacities'. These included: the ability to read a situation; the capacity to exercise balanced judgement; and the display of intuition and political acumen. These capacities were set alongside the skills and knowledge that the project heads saw as essential, thus depicting a mixture of requirements.

Jirasinge and Lyons (1996, p 120) said that 'as many questions seemed to be thrown up by the research as answers provided'. They nevertheless hoped that their work would assist with the development, appointment and appraisal of effective heads and provide a 'profitable direction for the education sector to follow' (ibid., p 121).

Recent investigations into the nature of school leadership

The questions about headship that were beginning to emerge from the consideration of the post 1988 literature were about the nature of the job, the head's accountability and the most appropriate preparation. Two studies considered the nature of school leadership and the expectations of heads now that the provisions of the 1988 Act were well established.

MacBeath explored the implications of 'a policy shift towards devolution of responsibility towards individual schools' (MacBeath 1998, p xi). This project involved collecting data from heads, staff, parents, governors and pupils. The work was carried out not only in England but also Scotland and Denmark. A number of powerful themes emerged. For example, heads recorded the perception that they were very stretched through having to meet so many expectations. Many referred to the ongoing imperative to lead and manage change. Furthermore, heads expressed the view that the job was a source of both excitement and anxiety resulting from the opportunities and threats arising from the possession of wide ranging powers.

According to the conclusions drawn from this study, successful heads displayed a mixture of professional and managerial attributes. Professional qualities included 'upholding standards', 'establishing expectations' and 'providing a view of the future - a vision' (MacBeath 1998, p 33). Managerial aspects incorporated the capacity to handle people, delegate responsibilities and manage resources. Heads summarised their own work as: the development of the overall direction of the school; establishing effective teams within the school; and responding to parents, students and staff. They talked of resolving contradictions and dilemmas, including staff demands for both collegiality and direction.

This study also investigated others' expectations of heads. Parents were reported as looking for a combination of assertive leadership and empathy and a sympathetic response. Some teachers were said to value strong leadership with personal vision while others preferred the head who was 'one of us' (ibid., p 63) while some wanted both. Heads stated that they thought teachers sought clear guidance and professional support. Governors stressed the need for the capacity to form good relationships while students were said to want the head to be friendly, ensure good discipline and organise the school efficiently.

The heads in this study experienced high levels of demand which were expressed in terms of taking overall responsibility, managing change, meeting expectations, providing leadership and managing efficiently. The cumulative effects of the delegation of responsibility were described more fully here than in previous studies. Headship was portrayed both as a holistic activity and as series of tasks. The heads in the study were conscious of the demands and expectations of key constituent groups. The research teams both sought the views of parents, staff and others and reflected the heads' thoughts on the aspirations of those groups.

Another study of headship presented a holistic perspective, referring to 'the complexity of leadership and the means by which leaders may become effective and maintain effectiveness' (Day *et al* 2000, p 159). The authors pointed out that a leader's work was affected primarily by the wider cultural climate in which he/she was operating and by his/her own views and values. 'The heads in the study communicated their personal vision and belief system by direction, words and deeds.' (ibid., p 171).

This research involved case studies of twelve heads and entailed gathering data on what the heads themselves thought of their work and also on the views of deputies, teaching staff, parents, governors, support staff and students. The data from the various groups were reported in discrete chapters and a large number of quotations were included, 'she explains things in laymen's terms' is a quote from an administrative assistant (Day *et al* 2000, p 93). Additional evidence was derived from a survey of studies of managers and leaders and studies of heads. These indicated that the 'skills and behaviours of effective leaders are driven by beliefs and trust in others; and that effective leaders recognise and are skilled in managing tensions and dilemmas within a framework of competing values' (ibid., p 24). The analysis of the data from the study included an assessment of some of these tensions and dilemmas: autocracy versus democracy; personal time versus professional tasks; and personal values versus institutional imperatives (ibid.).

This last study portrayed the head as the leader who believes he or she is there to make a difference. The responsibility of the head to lead and manage change was highlighted by Weindling and Earley (1987) and echoed by a number of heads through other studies. However, there are questions to be asked about how that change is brought about and the answers to those questions are based upon the view of headship being taken. The head as the most senior executive has to discharge the functions of the job so as to ensure that the organisation moves forward. This can be done through the process of setting standards and

managing teams and their accountability effectively. This may or may not entail the kind of leadership from the head which is alluded to by Day *et al* (2000). The kind of leadership that of itself makes a difference has certain characteristics (Gronn 1999) including engineering change, framing meaning and being persuasive. Leadership of this type involves the followers in acting differently because of the leader and identifying closely with that leader. It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that all heads would be able to be leaders in the same sense. Different personalities in different contexts will bring about change in various ways

The studies reviewed in this chapter have pointed to a range of ways in which headship was developing during the years prior to and following the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act. A number of areas of interest have emerged including: the nature of headship itself; definitions and measurement of success; the expectations of staff, pupils, parents and governors; and preparation for headship. The next chapter includes a consideration of the most suitable methods to be employed to explore these areas of interest and their refinement into research questions.

Introduction

In order to design an investigation to explore the areas of interest in the previous chapter, a number of decisions had to be made about the nature of the study. The first section of the chapter is concerned with the answers to a series of questions about the study. The questions included the following: Was the approach phenomenological or positivist? Were the data inclined to be qualitative or quantitative in character? What was the relationship between the data and any theory or proposition? What types of methods were, therefore, most appropriate for the study?

The second section contains an evaluation of the possible methods as part of the process of defining the investigative design. This evaluation includes an assessment of the case study approach and an examination of the suitability of a range of ways of gathering the data. The third section details the pilot process, the lessons learnt and the implications for the main investigation. It also incorporates a discussion of how the data analysis process was developed. The conclusion or fourth part summarises the implementation and provides the link between the data gathering process and the record of the data catalogued in the ensuing chapter.

Methodological Questions

The nature of the topic under investigation

'Research has been defined as a process of seeking, by means of methodical enquiry, to solve problems and to add to one's body of knowledge and that of others by the discovery of significant facts and insights' (Herbert 1990, p 1). 'Significant facts and insights' represents a broad range of research outcomes, for example, new treatments for diseases or ways of understanding the cultures that exist in organisations. The approach taken to reach any particular outcome varies according to linked factors: the purpose of the study; the subject matter to be examined; and the researcher's understanding and philosophy of knowledge and how these perspectives relate to the study. Broadly these factors can be grouped according to whether they reflect a phenomenological or a positivist stance and whether the data to be gathered will incline toward the qualitative or the quantitative in character. In drawing the distinction between positivism and phenomenology I found it helpful to look in particular at the definition of phenomenology provided by Easterby-Smith (1991).

Positivists believe that truths must be objectively established through scientific means, that knowledge and understanding are derived from a study of an external reality. Positivism is associated with analytic and synthetic questions (Caldwell 1982) and their cognitive significance, suggesting therefore that understanding 'can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment' (Cohen and Manion 1985, p12). According to the positivist the researcher or observer is independent and uses scientific method, which is free of value judgements, to identify the only truly verifiable reality, that is, that which can be externally and formally observed. A researcher may well adopt this stance from a personal conviction about the nature of truth and reality. Equally, it may be that the nature of the investigation or study requires this approach, for example the development of a cancer drug.

Phenomenology, on the other hand, rests upon the premise that there are significant and meaningful realities that are derived from understanding human behaviour and experience. 'Hence the task of the social scientist should not be to gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur, but to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience' (Easterby-Smith *et al* 1991, p24). The phenomenologist believes that an understanding of human behaviour constitutes an important form of truth or reality. For the phenomenologist, reality is also in part actually constructed by each of us as we make sense of our own observations. Therefore, research about experience and behaviour must take into account the constructs being placed on the data by those who are observed or questioned. The data cannot by nature be completely value free under these circumstances.

The term phenomenology covers a wide range of different types of research study. Some studies may actually employ elements of the positivist approach. For example, a consideration of factors leading to road accidents could draw on statistics which are objectively gathered and observations about driver behaviours. The latter, however carefully gathered, will be, to some extent, subjective in nature. Whatever methods are used, all phenomenological studies have in common the fact that they are seeking to shed light on human behaviour and experience, to provide interpretations rather than proofs (Mason 1996). The studies have to be planned in such a way as to minimise bias or make it identifiable because of the partly subjective nature of the work.

The phenomenological stance suited this study because it sought to extend understanding of the role of the head and interpret the experience of heads. The intention was to carry out the research in such a way as to provide credible insights into the impact of recent legislation, in particular the 1988 Act, on the way heads went about their work. It was to be a study of 'direct experience at face value' because of the importance of 'the phenomena of experience'

in determining behaviour (Cohen and Manion 1985, p31). As a serving head I initially used my own experience to identify the possible subject matter. I explored and refined this subject matter through the literature. I then used my own position as a head to engage the heads for the study, although I also had to recognise and acknowledge my own experience and understanding of headship in order to guard against producing a biased report.

Phenomenological studies tend to rely more heavily on the kinds of methods that produce qualitative rather than quantitative data. Surveys, questionnaires and interviews involving large numbers of people tend to produce quantitative data whereas qualitative data tend to rely on in-depth explorations and are more dependent on words than numbers: 'qualitative data are sexy' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p 1). This reference is an allusion to rich descriptions and explanations, rooted in experience of the relevant context. Research methods that generate qualitative data are seen as interactive, concerned with the undertaking of explorations in particular social settings (Mason 1996).

This study of secondary headship in the maintained sector in the post 1988 context had, therefore, been identified as phenomenological in that it was exploratory in nature and that the subject matter was the examination of the experience of heads themselves. Additionally, the perspective of the practising secondary head as researcher entailed an interest in 'the constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience' (Easterby-Smith *et al* 1991, p 24). The data that were gathered were also likely to be qualitative because of the exploratory nature of the study.

The choice of research methods

Some phenomenological studies can produce rather unfocussed reports (Miles and Huberman 1994) in that there is a story told rather than an analysis produced that leads to some sort of theory or potential explanation. This study was intended to produce some more specific conclusions and insights than appeared in some of the post 1988 studies included in the literature survey. In order to establish what type of phenomenological study would be most appropriate it was important to consider what was meant by conclusions and insights. The literature survey had led to the identification of certain areas for further exploration. It was not possible to specify any propositions about those areas. Rather the purpose was to extend understanding of these aspects with the intention that propositions or constructs could be an outcome.

A set of interrelated propositions or constructs that provides a systematic explanation of a phenomenon is known as a theory (Cohen and Manion 1985). If the theory is likely to emerge from the research process rather than be tested by it then the theory is said to be grounded in the evidence itself (Glaser and Strauss 1968). The way in which the constructs emerge from the evidence is often through a process which entails the ongoing refinement of emerging conclusions as data are gathered (Miles and Huberman 1994). Such a study is likely to depend on an iterative process through which data are gathered and analysed and then revisited as more data are accumulated. In other words, data analysis and theory develop hand in hand. It is often the case that the data that can be analysed interactively in this way are qualitative and that the researcher approaches the study from a phenomenological perspective.

The strength of this exploratory way of working was that it constituted a marriage between narrative and analysis. The narrative element allowed for a sense of chronology and a series of insights and stories to be detailed to convey meaning and develop an argument (Miles and

Huberman 1994). The analysis consisted of the methodical accumulation and testing of the material to lend credibility to the conclusions drawn. The reference to the combination of narrative and analysis suggested the exploration of a subject's story. A case study would involve contemplating the subject in context (Nisbett and Watt 1984) and would indeed entail exploring the story and using the data generated to draw conclusions with a wider application.

In opting for the case study approach I found the analysis provided by Yin particularly relevant. Yin wrote that ' the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events' (quoted in Mason 1996, p 129). A case study is the systematic consideration of a phenomenon. It includes an account of the relevant context or history, derived from observation and/or systematic interviewing. This case study design needed to be based upon: the research questions; the desired end product; the investigation to link the two (Merriam 1988). The research issues were already identified. The end product was an illumination of those issues. In order to design the investigation it was important to examine further the nature of the case study and in particular to evaluate the range of available methods for data gathering and analysis. This examination and evaluation had to be undertaken next so as to facilitate the detailed design of the study.

Evaluation and Selection of Methods

Key factors in designing the case study

I had identified the case study as a suitable approach to exploring the phenomenon of headship. It would allow me to consider the work and role of the head in context and gather data to shed some light on the issues identified as a result of the literature survey. The term ‘case study’ refers to an investigation ‘around an instance’ (Adelman 1984, p 94). It is a term that can defy precise definition because of the various forms it can take and different methods that can be selected. Case study research is not about simply undertaking a series of observations or carrying out some experiments. Nor does a case study represent a standard set of methods. Each case study employs a group of methods judged most suitable for the particular project. It was necessary to reflect on the nature of a case study in detail in order to determine the nature of this particular study and therefore the most appropriate set of methods.

The advantage of undertaking a ‘systematic investigation of a specific instance’ (Nisbet and Watt 1984, p 73) lies in the wealth and depth of insights that can result. In order to be clear that the study is a piece of rigorously focussed analysis and not simply a description, the subject must be sharply defined. For example, if the study is devoted to the impact of a particular decision on an organisation, the focus must be on that one organisation and not on the impact of that type of decision in a variety of contexts. Part of the process of identifying the subject is determining what is known as the unit of analysis (Yin 1984). As I suggested in the previous section, I have found Yin’s discussion of the case study particularly relevant to my research. The unit of analysis is the precise focus for the study and can be, for example, an organisation, a group of people, an individual, a set of regulations or a particular activity. The definition of the unit of analysis is informed by the nature of the research issues (later to be

defined more closely in the form of research questions). My study concerned four aspects of the role and work of the secondary head in the maintained sector post 1988. The unit of analysis in my case, therefore, was the nature of headship and so depended on an investigation of the experience of one or more headteachers.

Defining the unit of analysis enables the researcher to come to some other decisions about the case study. One choice is between the single and the multiple case study (Yin 1994). A single case study entails the study of one subject, for example the work of an exceptional leader or the medical history of an individual patient. A single case study is likely to be most suitable when there is an extraordinary or apparently unique instance to be explored. A further application of the single case study is the additional testing of an already accepted theory. The alternative, however, is to opt for a multiple case study which involves the choice of more than one subject and therefore enables comparisons to be made within the study. The data from a multiple case study can be seen as more robust since it is dealing with evidence that represents more than a single instance. The multiple case study is more demanding in terms of the breadth of data gathering, however, and runs the risk of becoming diffuse if the focus is extended by the range of subjects.

The decision about the unit of analysis is vital in determining whether the case study is single or multiple. In the case of my study, as I have indicated, the unit of analysis was the nature of secondary headship in the secondary maintained sector following legislative changes. It would have been possible to base such a study on one subject headteacher but very difficult to suggest trends or constructs for further study that would be readily seen as likely to be relevant to a large number of heads. Therefore a multiple case study seemed to be most suitable because it would facilitate the study a number of heads in order to identify some possible trends.

A case study, whether single or multiple, can have a single unit of analysis. For example, a specific area of legislation could be the unit of analysis and certain laws could be the subjects of the case study. The research questions would be about this one area in its entirety while the case study would be a multiple study because of the number of laws. Yin (1994) calls this a holistic study, concentrating on a single topic. If, however, rather than dealing with one area of legislation, the study was concerned with the impact of several linked types of legislation then more than one unit of analysis would be entailed. This type of study is known by Yin as 'embedded' because the different units are subsumed within one closely defined study.

If the study of the work and role of the head had been about, for example, the working day, then it would have been more appropriate to describe the study as holistic. However, four distinct, although linked, aspects of headship had been identified for investigation and this suggested that the multiple case study should be of the 'embedded' type, containing 'a set of subunits' (Yin 1994, p 149). This provided for the flexibility to explore the various aspects of headship with a range of subjects. There was the danger with a multiple embedded case study that the original focus would be lost and the study become too broad and so this pitfall was borne in mind in the consideration of data to be gathered and methods to be deployed.

However, there were also potentially some real advantages for my study in the combination of the specific focus with the scope for some generalisation, however limited, through the identification of several subjects and therefore 'a pattern of influences' (Nisbet and Watt 1984, p 76).

In selecting the methods, other features of case studies had to be borne in mind. Case studies can be described as '*particularistic*', '*descriptive*', '*heuristic*' and '*inductive*' (Merriam 1988). They are '*particularistic*' in that they focus on a specific aspect and '*descriptive*' in that details that provide a picture that is a 'rich "thick" description of the phenomenon under study' (Merriam 1988, p 11). They are '*heuristic*' because the study leads to an illumination

of understanding and '*inductive*' because the data tend to allow propositions to emerge from the process of analysis. These terms apply particularly to this study since the data as gathered were designed in the first instance to paint a detailed picture and then through the subsequent analysis to extend understanding that could lead to the development of constructs for further investigation. The desired end product (Merriam 1988) was a set of conclusions about the nature of secondary headship that could inform current selection and support and stimulate further investigation. The methods of data gathering, the investigation to link the research issues or questions with the end product, were selected with these purposes in mind.

Any case study may depend on qualitative or quantitative methods in order to gather data or can utilize a mixture of the two. The qualitative approach appeared to be appropriate because of the very exploratory nature of the subject. However, having determined that it was to be a multiple case study with several units of analysis embedded within it, the question of the most appropriate type of methods or methods had to be considered. One approach involved the gathering and analysing of data through surveys and/or questionnaires. This approach generally involves the reliance on a quantitative group of methods although sometimes a qualitative researcher will use a questionnaire as part of the initial clarification of question or selection of subject. This type of survey could well provide a complement to the actual case study work itself, for example, 'The project was designed to include survey and case study methods' (Weindling and Earley 1987, p7).

The benefit of incorporating some large scale data gathering of this sort as well as the in-depth work with a smaller number of subjects is that it extends both the range of data and the potential for generalisation. There is emphasis on a breadth of views alongside the detailed exploration of individuals' perceptions and experiences. Projects designed in this way are intended to reach conclusions that have an application. My study was rather intended to concentrate on shedding light on certain areas and therefore raising more questions.

Furthermore, the range of methods used in a study like the one by Weindling and Earley was also very demanding on research time and resources.

The research purpose was to explore the issues through studying heads in order to illuminate the nature of secondary headship post 1988. I was combining this with my full time employment so my choice of methods had to be both suitable and feasible. The survey was not suitable in that data was to be sought from in-depth explorations. Sometimes case studies are carried out either by setting up an experiment involving the subjects or by undertaking detailed observations of the subjects in action. The former was not a suitable course of action since testing a theory or proposition was not involved and therefore there was no basis for an experiment. The use of observation, while likely to yield a really rich supply of data, like the material derived from observing Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings (Wallace and Hall 1994), was also very difficult to arrange given my work commitments.

The imperative was to select methods that would allow the exploration of the areas specified by the literature. The study was not concerned with seeking proof but rather depth of insight. Nor was it intended to act as a test of certain theories or even find definitive answers to questions but to extend understanding in a way that could influence practice and stimulate further investigation. The interest was in studying case study subjects in context, allowing for the practical constraints.

The question of validity

In addition to avoiding the lack of focus and rigour sometimes associated with case studies and ensuring that the methods were practicable and appropriate for the topic, the question of validity had to be considered carefully. While the intention was not to prove something or even demonstrate absolutely that the conclusions could be generalised universally, it was necessary to ensure a level of credibility. The choice of more than one subject meant that it was possible to include comparisons between heads in the evidence base. The methods chosen needed to be scrutinised carefully to explain the link between the data gathering and the conclusions or propositions. There had to be mechanisms within the study to ensure consistency of interpretation and application of data. The structure of the study, the means of analysis and the shape of the final written account, had to be designed to ensure clarity and readability. The credibility of the study rested, therefore, on: sufficiency of data based on the choice of more than one subject; consistency and clarity in the implementation of research methods including data analysis; internal and external comparisons; and the means therefore to test conclusions and their consistency.

A 'strength of qualitative research' (Merriam 1988, p 168) is what is known as internal validity which means testing the findings against reality by making various comparisons. Reality is, according to Lincoln and Guba, 'a multiple sense of mental constructions...made by humans' (quoted in Merriam 1988, p 168). Internal validity can be demonstrated by ensuring that the data collection and analysis take into account the possibility of different perceptions and interpretations by testing the data from a variety of perspectives.

There are a number of ways of testing the quality of the data. Triangulation, the use of more than one method of data gathering, allows for comparisons between the findings that emerge from the different sets of data. Interviews can, for example, be accompanied by surveys of a

wider range of similar subjects or the analysis of documents like minutes of meetings and reports. Member checks (returning to interviewees to ask for confirmation and further clarification) in addition to the interview method permit the researcher to involve the subjects in the iterative process of focussing on emerging conclusions. Observations and participant research provide the opportunity to make comparisons over time. Peer examination concerns the process of asking for colleagues' views. I had already identified that observations and participant research were impracticable given my circumstances. It was vital, however, to choose more than one data gathering method in order to demonstrate that the data had been tested from more than one perspective and for more than one interpretation. Member checks would contribute to this process. Equally, analysing documents could provide a contrast to deriving data from interviews.

Another way of making comparisons was the consideration of the views of headship that emerged from the literature survey and the research. In effect, this ensured that the act of making a comparison between findings from the data and conclusions from other studies contributed a type of external validity. In comparing some of the selections of methods employed by researchers represented in the literature survey, it has already been observed that my study was regarded as entirely qualitative and would not be enhanced by employing questionnaires or surveys. The particular interest was in drawing together in some detail the views and experiences of a small number of heads. The studies in the survey that focussed on data from a small number of heads, (Mortimore and Mortimore 1991, Ribbins and Marland 1994) provided data without drawing significant conclusions that could be of use to other heads and influence the selection, training and support of heads.

An interview would provide a significant source of data because it would allow for the exploration of issues and implications with individual heads. The choice of documentary analysis, in addition to applying member checks to the work with each case study head, would

extend the types of data incorporated into the investigation. The capacity to compare the outcomes from the various heads would provide another point of comparison. In addition to the member check with each head after their first interview further sources of data could take the form of a brief re-interview with each head and an interview with senior staff so as to use their views as yet another point of comparison. These elements constituted the data strategy. They were selected because they would provide both data that would appropriately extend understanding of headship and provide opportunities to demonstrate validity.

Considering the interview

As the interview was central to the research, the next decision was the choice of the most suitable type of interview. Interviews are concerned with the examination of behaviour, experience, relationships and links between various phenomena. They are concerned with making sense and meaning. Interviews include accounts of feelings, hopes and fear, statements of opinions and descriptions of specific events (Ackroyd and Hughes 1981).

Interviews can be conducted in a variety of ways depending on their purpose and context. The formal, standard or closed interview consists of a precise schedule of questions and follows a tightly structured plan. This approach tends to resemble a spoken survey and is not, therefore, readily compatible with proposition development as opposed to proposition testing. At the other extreme is the unstructured or exploratory interview that relies on allowing the story to unfold as the interviewee reflects on the topic. The latter can be extremely time consuming although likely to generate a good deal of data (Wragg 1984). In the light of the desire not just to assemble a mass of data but also to come to a series of conclusions it seemed appropriate to conduct the interviews in such a way as to facilitate the process of analysis.

The semi-structured interview (Johnson 1994) seemed to be the most suitable choice since it combined flexibility with the framework element of the structured interview. 'The semi-structured interview has a similar aim of collecting information from a number of people, but places less emphasis on a standardised approach' (Johnson 1994, p 45). The method relies on a standard set of questions followed by additional probes to 'draw out all relevant responses' (Hoinville and Jowell 1994, p 140). This type of interview is like a conversation but differs from it in a number of significant respects: one party does most of the talking; the topic is agreed beforehand; the transitions from one aspect to another are managed; and the duration is predetermined (Werner and Schoepfle 1987).

Once the decision had been taken to adopt the semi-structured interview the next step was to design the mode of member checking. Each interview was to be recorded, transcribed in full, analysed and summarised. Heads were then to be asked to comment on the summaries. The semi-structured interviews with senior staff and the re-interview with the head were planned to take place later in the cycle in order to gauge the impact of developments.

Documentary analysis

I also elected to analyse some documentation provided by each case study head. Some documents were requested to give contextual information about the school, these were the school prospectus and the governors' report to parents. The documents that would merit further detailed study would be the report on the school from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the school development plan.

The Ofsted report relied on one prescribed model of success of school leadership and management and gave a judgement on the work of the particular head in the particular school. The development plan encapsulated a written and published version of the aspirations of the

head, senior staff and governors. These documents, therefore, reflected different perspectives on the work of the head. They had been written to criteria which were separate from and independent of my data gathering process. In the case of the Ofsted reports, they were written to an external set of standards. The documents were used to identify points of similarity, comparison and contrast in relation to the data gained from the interviews.

Documentary evidence has to be relevant and available (Merriam 1988). Both had an evident significance in terms of the day to day work of the head. Both were readily available from the schools and, in the case of Ofsted reports, in the public domain. The school development plan not only captured the aspirations of the collective school leadership, it was also intended to recognise external requirements and translate them into targets. The school development plan was also a component in the external monitoring of schools since aspects of it were needed by the Local Education Authority in relation to the distribution of grants through the Standards Fund. The current Ofsted report in any school has to be used as a reference point in the preparation of the development plan and there is a requirement to report annually to parents on progress with issues for action

In analysing documentary evidence it has to be borne in mind that a document has been written for a purpose. For example, the Ofsted report contains the considered judgements about the effectiveness of the school at a particular point in the school's history. Those judgements were made against stated criteria. The impact of the purpose of the document must be considered when extracting material for a study with a separate purpose.

Documentary analysis is also complicated by the fact that some documents can be analysed for two types of material: that which is intended or written 'wittingly'; and that which is implied or emerges as an apparently unintended consequence of generating the document and is therefore written 'unwittingly' (Robson 1994). Evidence from documents, therefore, needs to be weighed in the light of the purpose of the document, the contents of the document and

any implications of what is implied by the inclusion of, the allusion to, or the omission of, certain details.

To sum up, the study would rely on interviews, member checks and documentary analysis. It was to be exploratory in style and therefore the operation of the study would have to be piloted to enable the framework for the interviews and the way in which the data would be analysed had to be established. The following section includes the details of the pilot process and the iterative approach (Miles and Huberman 1994) entailed in devising the means of gathering and analysing the data.

The Pilot Phase

The study had been defined as requiring data that had to be gathered through undertaking semi-structured interviews with heads and senior staff, supplemented by data derived from the analysis of documents. The purpose of the pilot phase was to determine how best to structure the interviews, the basis on which the subjects should be selected, the identification of any researcher bias and the approach to analysing the data.

Defining the research questions

The conclusion to the literature chapter contained a definition of the key issues for study:

- the very nature of the job;
- definitions of success and criteria for judging that success;
- the implications of identifying and meeting a range of expectations; and
- the preparation and selection for such a demanding role.

These had to be formulated into research questions since they represented the 'essence' (Mason 1996, p 15) of the study.

The first issue was redefined as 'What are the key features of headship?'. The perspectives of heads themselves and their senior staff, compared and contrasted with insights from the documents would provide insights into practice which would illustrate the reality of headship.

The next issue concerned success definitions and was not so easy to define. Two versions were considered: 'what is success in headship?' and 'what do heads perceive as success in headship?'. The difficulty with the former was that it could be seen to imply the existence of a

broader evidence base than the study was likely to contain, given the reasons already outlined for the selection of methods. The limitation of the latter was that it implied entirely personal responses without the potential to impose rigour on the data. It was clear that the inquiry had to concentrate on the experiences of the individual heads but that there had to be other data about success in order to give the individuals' insights wider significance. The question was worded 'What is the individual head's perception of success and how does he/she measure it?' The capacity to compare the individual head's observations on measurement with the feedback from senior staff and with the contents of the Ofsted report was intended to broaden the relevance of the data without making unrealistic claims for its generalisability.

The third issue concerned the expectations of others, defined as staff, parents, governors and students. The question was worded 'how do heads perceive and respond to their main audiences (staff, parents, students and governors)? It was anticipated that heads would talk a good deal about work with these groups as would senior staff and it was important to design the interviews to allow space for the data gathering for this issue.

The fourth issue, related to preparation and selection, was more straightforward. The explanation was encapsulated as 'What do heads say about preparation for and support during headship?' and heads were invited to comment on current provision and compare it with what they perceived to be necessary. This would enable comparisons to be drawn between the findings and current practice. The exploration needed to include the discussion of essential qualities to be possessed or developed for headship and the process of being selected and embarking on the work.

Undertaking the pilots

There were two phases to the pilot work. The first involved interviewing a selection of heads about issues relating to the introduction of Local Management of Schools. This phase was actually undertaken prior to the final clarification of the research purposes as outlined above, and informed both the process of defining the purposes and defining the means of investigation. I talked to eight heads about their experiences of increased managerial autonomy. A number of significant lessons emerged.

Firstly, it was evident that the analysis of the literature needed to define the research purpose more narrowly in order to provide a sufficiently clear framework upon which the interview schedule could be based. Secondly, it was necessary to be specific about the rationale for choosing particular heads of particular schools. The data derived from this pilot illustrated how variations in school type created complications in differentiating features of heads' experiences from characteristics of school types. An example would be the difference in expectations of the head between the parents and staff of a rural school serving villages and those of an inner city school serving a deprived urban area. Thirdly, the process of preparing a paper summarising the findings from the disparate interviews, while helpful in establishing the need for clarification, also highlighted the necessity of planning the interviews carefully. It was too easy to run out of time before covering all the areas, thus compromising consistency between interviews.

The second pilot was designed to test the refined interview structure which had been constructed to gather data to inform the defined research purpose. A series of trigger questions were identified as relevant to the research questions and posed during two pilot interviews. The list of pointers was quite long, consisting of aspects of each issue. It proved impossible to persuade either head that they could spare more than one and a half hours and it transpired

therefore that the list of triggers was too long to be considered properly in the time.

Furthermore, the detailed list worked against the notion of the semi structured interview since it provided distinct direction rather than allowing the interviewer to pursue points made by the subject. Experience gained through this pilot pointed to a semi structured interview of limited length, shaped around a few main areas. The technique adopted was to involve notifying the head beforehand of the areas for discussion and then to seek clarification and further detail as necessary.

Learning from the pilots

The pilots, therefore, enabled the study itself and the approach to the interviews to be refined. They also prompted some decisions about the choice of subjects. The heads needed to represent a variety of backgrounds, including the school contexts. However, the school types had to be consistent to ensure that the picture that emerged was of the heads' work and of differences and similarities between the heads rather than between the types of school. The school type chosen was the 11-18 comprehensive co-educational school in an urban but not inner city area.

Another aspect to consider in order to maximise consistency in my work was the matter of researcher bias (Miles and Huberman 1994). I considered my position as a colleague head as an advantage in that I would be a researcher who would be likely to establish a rapport with the interviewees readily (Merriam 1988). Furthermore, I would be able to persuade busy colleagues to give time to discussing current changes and I was convinced that my work would be relevant to practising heads and serving governors. I was also aware of the disadvantages, not least how to distinguish the views of the various heads from my own. A close adherence to the methodology and consistent application was essential. This included

accurate recording, ongoing writing up and seeking feedback from subjects. This process is described in the next section.

Implementation

The first step was to recruit the case study heads. The experience of the first pilot had established one criterion, namely that the type of school would be broadly the same, although there were bound to be differences between the situations of the schools. All the subjects were to be heads of 11-18 co-educational comprehensive schools. This would introduce a control over variables. Certain factors would not be allowed to affect the research, for example the presence or otherwise of: a sixth form; selection; and single sex provision. The schools were to be urban rather than rural but not in inner city areas. This eliminated extreme variations in context. Given the constraints on my time, the schools needed to be situated within reasonable travelling distance. Equally, in order to ensure a comparably neutral relationship with each school, each one had to be located outside my own LEA.

It was important to determine how many heads to study. The multiple case study model was predicated on the capacity to compare data from a variety of heads but there were also the constraints of researcher time and availability of heads to be born in mind. The study of just four headteachers at work (Hall *et al* 1986) had indicated the range of insights to be gleaned from four subjects. Interviews alone with seven heads (Ribbins and Marland 1994) had yielded a considerable body of data. Six case study heads appeared to be potentially sufficient to provide a selection of individual perspectives, allow for a number of conclusions and be manageable.

Six cannot possibly be representative of the total population of secondary heads in the maintained sector. However, just as it was sensible to eliminate the variables relating to different types of school, so it seemed wise to draw on the experiences of a variety of heads in order to try to incorporate the richest possible range of perspectives and to introduce some variables quite deliberately. These individual variables were: gender of head;

first/second/third headship; grant maintained/foundation or LEA maintained/community.

Several LEA areas were to be represented. Variables related to the running of the school were: size of school; levels of student attainment; proportions of students with special needs; and percentages of students from ethnic minority groups. The process of recruiting the individual heads entailed first of all identifying potential towns and researching the local school system to ensure that the schools might be suitable. The individual heads were then approached. The table below (Fig 1) shows that the six schools were drawn from four LEA areas. They appear on the table in the order they were visited.

Fig 1 The subject heads

Name	Sex	Number Of Headships	Status of School	Size of School	Attainment	Statement and SEN register	Ethnic Minority
Andrea	F	1	Community	828	Below 20% 5+ A* - C	37%	Not significant.
Brian	M	2	Community	1,331	Just below national average.	28%	8.5%
Cathy	F	1	Foundation	1,141	National average.	3% + 1% *	5%
Derek	M	1	Community	600	Below national average.	30%	Not significant.
Ed	M	1	Foundation	1,400	On or near national average.	28%	Not significant.
Fiona	F	3	Community	1,100	Above national average.	12.8%	Not significant.

* Statemented only, no figure for all on register

The heads were not all identified simultaneously, rather as I was ready to interview them. However, the criteria designed to provide the element of consistency as well as sufficient variety were applied fully every time.

Recruiting them was not easy, however, reflecting the increasing sense of overload described by heads (Grace 1995). Some expressed an initial interest but later dropped out. The process of identifying the heads and persuading them to take part proved to be as iterative as the process of data analysis. The first candidate, initially known as Head A and later identified as Andrea, was willing to take part because she had herself been involved in a research project and had been grateful for the contributions of others. Her participation enabled the project to commence and an outline interview schedule was devised to support the semi-structured approach and enable data to be gathered towards answering the four research questions.

Interview schedule

- Personal background;
- Head's expectations of staff and perceptions and experience of staff expectations of head;
- Challenges and issues when working with parents;
- Pupil expectations;
- Working with governors; and
- Training, preparation, essential qualities and support for doing the job.

The main headings (listed above) were designed to:

- Elicit information about the individual head in terms of particular background and priorities;
- Allow the interview to focus on the work of the head, especially in respect of the expectations of the four key groups of staff, parents, pupils and governors;
- Bring out, from this focus on expectations, notions of success and significant tasks and responsibilities; and
- Allow the head to comment on the effectiveness of his/her preparation for fulfilling this role effectively;

Appendix One lists the prompts prepared to help with the process of exploring the head's answers.

The plan was to record and transcribe in full every interview. A summary of the significant points was to be sent to each head so that he/she could correct misunderstandings and omissions. This was the process known as the member check. The next stage in the process was a revisit interview. The structure for this return interview to each head was derived from the following two sources.

- Questions about developments based on main outcomes from the main interview; and
- Comments made by the head in response to the summary of these findings.

The second visit to each school also involved talking to senior staff. These interviews were planned along the following lines:

- Personal background and career history;

- Expectations of the head;
- Work with staff, parents, pupils, governors;
- Specific matters that had emerged from the interviews with the head; and
- Preparation and training for the job and aspirations.

The documentary evidence was also to be collected at this point to provide confirmation of or challenge to the emerging conclusions in the case of each head. All of this had been established after the pilot phase and was worked through in detail during the process of working with Head A, later known as Andrea.

The first main interview with Head A yielded a mass of data. Every word was recorded and transcribed and then analysed. A summary was sent to head A and in due course she responded. All of this was quite time consuming and so many months elapsed before Head B, later known as Brian, was recruited. The same procedure was followed as for Head A. There were a number of logistical obstacles to be overcome during the duration of the study. The time taken to complete the initial phase of work with Head A and B was about eighteen months. The interviewing of new subjects had to be planned alongside revisiting those heads who were interviewed earlier. I also had to cope with an Ofsted inspection at my own school and a family bereavement. In addition to the pressures on my time, there were the problems experienced by the case study heads themselves. Revisits were delayed by the impact of Ofsted inspections and staff shortages. Two heads changed schools after the first interview which meant that the revisit had to be hurriedly arranged. This meant that similar intervals were not maintained between the stages of data gathered in each case.

Despite these difficulties, however, all phases were completed according to the original plan with each case study head, ensuring a level of consistency. The difficulties were indicative of the pace of events and the degree of ongoing change. The delays also meant that the research

took longer than planned but that also added points of interest in that it was possible to parallel national changes and changes in the heads' responses.

As more subjects were engaged the time required for the research inevitably grew. At the same time as there were new subjects to be interviewed there were interviews to analyse and heads to be revisited. Alongside all of this there was the process of organising and analysing the increasing amount of data. In the same way as the data gathering process was in part developed during the pilot and then further refined as the research was undertaken, so the framework for the analysis took some time to develop.

The process of analysis was based on the practice of coding as a way of organising and interpreting an increasing volume of data (Miles and Huberman 1994). During the research period a variety of codes was deployed in order to understand the data from a number of different perspectives. Initial attempts to structure the data according to categories associated with leadership and management proved ineffective. This was because the definitions of terms used to describe leadership and management were imprecise and this led to difficulties in allocating data consistently to codes. After a period of trying a range of combinations a series of groups of codes were identified which facilitated the presentation of: the answers to the research questions; the case studies in a consistent format; and the emergent themes.

The main code groups were:

- Job elements - tasks, duties, workload issues;
- School context;
- Leadership and management elements, defined to include senior staff teamwork, work on roles within school, organisational structures, communication of vision, generation of aims, public relations;

- Student matters;
- Parental issues;
- Work with governors;
- Performance indicators ranging from examination results to site quality, student recruitment, financial management;
- Change process;
- Dilemmas and tensions; and
- Personal developments and challenges.

These groups of codes were applied to each case study separately and labelled according to their source of origin, for example the main interview with the head or the documentary analysis. This produced a very large number of tabulations from which the material in the following chapters was generated. The figure below is included to provide an illustration. It is taken from the group of codes that related to the change process, in particular the element identified as the identification and incorporation of change. The case study head is named, in this case Andrea, and the actual pieces of data are arranged in columns which are headed according to source. The sources are the initial interview with the head, the head’s response (member check), the revisit interview, the interview with senior staff and the documentary analysis.

The data were also identified according to the source from which they originated, for example interview or documentary analysis. The few lines that relate to Andrea and change provide an illustration.

Fig 2 Illustrating the coding process

<p>Change - Identification and Incorporation</p>
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Case Study Heads	Interview with Head	Member Check	Revisit Interview	Senior Staff Interview	Documentary Analysis
Andrea	<p>'School survival' outreach rigour pupil success stim env.</p> <p>'Chief exec. - to show different'.</p> <p>Change culture away from 'cricket' to proper acc and management structures.</p>	Specific change agenda with one senior teacher - set him targets and timings.	Importance of vision in change - need to 'chunk it down'.	Recognised need to survive, be more outgoing, listen to the community and all be involved and at least 'have a say'. Sense of resignation then acceptance of need to change.	Ofsted report referred to well judged priorities for change, did not refer to any part by SMT in this. Likewise on excellent quality of planning. School development plan, praised by Ofsted as a model, exemplified this.

Once all the data had been recorded the results were summarised, case by case, and are presented in chapter 3, which consists of case study reports, including quotations from the relevant Ofsted reports. The data from the various cases were then regrouped in order to provide the answers to the original research questions. These are presented in chapter 4.

This study may be perceived as limited in certain ways. Firstly, the data are gathered from a very limited range of subjects - just six heads. Secondly, the data largely reflect the management perspective alone since the only source that was not explicitly and directly from the school management was the documentary analysis. Thirdly, the vehicle for analysis was developed as the data were gathered rather than fully established through trials beforehand. All of these factors limit the generalisability of the conclusions. The reasons for the limitations derive from my circumstances as a very part time researcher. The study also has a number of strengths. It is genuinely exploratory, allowing themes and questions to emerge and

convey a real sense of discovery. Changes in the national context were accommodated during the course of the project, thus retaining a contemporary flavour. The study is also rich in insights from heads and others. Despite the time constraints the data were constantly revisited as new aspects emerged, thus maximising the value of the outcomes. These are captured as: case study reports; answers to research questions; and emerging themes and conclusions.

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the case study reports. There is a report covering the data collected on each individual head. Each report is identified by the name given to the head. All names have been changed and were allocated in the order that the heads were recruited to the project. That order is alphabetical.

The data were analysed in the manner described in the previous chapter on the methodology. In the next chapter the data are used to answer the research questions. In this chapter the data are organised, for each head in turn, as follows: school context; strategies for change; staff; students; parents; governors; performance; and preparation. This structure broadly follows the sequence that was followed in the interviews with the heads, refined by the data analysis process to reflect change management and performance issues.

Heads: Andrea; Brian; Cathy; Derek; Ed; Fiona.

School Context

Andrea was head of a Local Education Authority (LEA) maintained (community) school, surrounded by Grant Maintained (later Foundation) schools that had opted for selection. Features of the school included a more than usually mobile population 'many pupils admitted during the year' (Ofsted) and a significant number of students with special educational needs (SEN). 300 students were on the SEN register from a school roll of 828 (nearly 37%). Of those 76 were statemented, representing 9% of the total cohort. 40% of students were in receipt of free school meals.

All these indicators reflected the fact that the school catered for an unusually high proportion of students from poorer backgrounds 'a higher proportion of pupils come from relatively disadvantaged homes than is the case generally in the area' (Ofsted). The performance of the school reflected a number of difficulties with a number of families. For example, attendance figures represented 'higher than average levels of absence from school' (Ofsted). Examination performance was well below national average and it was often the case that below 20% of students gained five or more good GCSE grades.

When she arrived at the school Andrea had faced the situation where school rolls were falling in her school and a neighbouring school. This led to the amalgamation with that neighbouring school. The consequences of planning and implementing the amalgamation included the following: the school operated on two sites for two years; two separate student and staff populations had to be united; and there was parental resentment to be overcome.

However, there were also benefits in the form of additional resources, expansion in student numbers and a building programme. The school attracted additional students, according to Andrea, because of the feeling of optimism that was generated by the growth in numbers and improvements in facilities that followed the amalgamation.

This was Andrea's first and only headship. Prior to taking up her post she had been employed as a deputy in a school in an urban area. While still serving as a deputy she had also taken on a part time role as an LEA adviser. She talked of the breadth of experience she had gained as a result but also of the tremendous level of demands placed on her and the techniques for personal organisation and self discipline that she had learnt as a consequence. She was interviewed (in 1997) shortly after her Ofsted inspection, when she had been in post for just over three years. The amalgamation was in the first year of the two years of implementation. She was revisited three years later.

Strategies for change

Andrea described her first day at the school. She was not allowed access prior to the first training day but had prepared for the day by meeting with the senior staff who wanted to work with her. She had also developed, following her interview for the post and based on her own philosophy, a clear view of what she wanted to propose. Andrea said that she was quite explicit about the need to boost student recruitment, improve examination performance, introduce a greater degree of rigour and generally move forward based on raised sights and pride in the school. She referred to herself as very clear about what she had to do – a view confirmed by the Ofsted report. Certain themes kept recurring through the interview. These included: the impact on the school of the league tables; the need for increasing rigour and stimulation in the classroom; and the imperative to make sure the school survived. ‘I knew that one school would have to close and it wasn’t going to be my school’.

As well as setting the context for whole school changes to boost standards on the first training day, Andrea also referred to the creation of a management structure. She alluded to the identification of specific expectations and accountabilities, starting with senior staff. She stressed her structured approach in comparison with that of the previous regime that she wryly characterised as ‘cricket’ (she linked membership and roles in the management team with membership of and roles in the staff cricket team). One member of the team elected not to work with her, she recalled, although he was prepared to return to the post of Head of Humanities where he was, she felt, effective. This allowed her to introduce new blood. The next challenge at senior level was the attempt to reform a senior teacher, through making expectations very clear and setting short term targets.

Andrea then described how she set up a whole school monitoring system which linked lesson preparation, observation and assessment – ‘Ofsted loved it’. This system was also used, she said, to gather evidence of the ongoing improvement in the quality of teaching. Andrea’s real frustration was the fact that it proved very difficult to increase the percentage of students

passing five or more A*-C grades. She said that the monitoring provided evidence of standards of teaching that were rising despite this fact.

Andrea also recognised, as she embarked in her headship, the need to 'sort out' the school's finances. The budget problems had in part resulted from the falling student roll. However, Andrea wanted to invest in the school environment as well as staff the school with the appropriate number of staff for the number of students. To attract extra income Andrea sought sponsorship, applied for grants and established a partnership with adult education to maximise the community use of the school. Andrea talked of running the school as a financially viable institution, 'like a business'. She was determined to be different from her predecessor and in her response to the summary of her interview (member check) described how she had presented herself to the staff as a 'Chief Executive' to stress the outgoing, business-like, performance-oriented image that she wanted to engender.

Staff

Andrea's comments on staff concentrated very much on the senior staff team and she talked of the rest of the staff in more general terms. She indicated that some teaching staff left during her first year because they did not share her vision. The amalgamation, which was initially managed by her in partnership with the LEA, led, as the implementation proceeded, to the absorption of some staff and the departure of others. Andrea referred to progress made by certain subject departments and issues with others but said that the work was ongoing. Her view was that she had to have an effective senior team in order to complete this process.

When she started at the school she made some changes in order to set up a team to support her in leading the school. One member, a senior teacher, was set targets to help him to improve his performance. Andrea referred to the amount of work involved in this process and how she

tried to maximise the value of the meetings to discuss his progress. The targets related to his performance and to work with students, including awards events and parents' evenings. She also talked of how her strategies did not work and the targets were not met. The senior teacher was not prepared to accept the situation and became a disruptive influence within the team. Andrea's next step was to stage a 'showdown' on a training day. She moved from routine business into a direct challenge to the senior teacher. Other members had been briefed beforehand so that they knew what to expect. The result of the confrontation was that the senior teacher left the team.

Once the team had re-formed, following this event, Andrea expressed her pleasure in being able to share the 'big picture' with the team. She alluded to the team's involvement in shaping and making policy, including school development planning. The senior teacher's salary was protected while he took on a more junior role. He proved, Andrea said, to be more effective in this role and her comment on the finance was that the cost was minimal compared to the disruption that could result from trying to invoke the capability procedures. The other development that pleased her was the capacity to involve individual middle managers in some of the planning on a secondment basis. When revisited, she reflected on the benefit to her of the feeling that not all the thinking depended on her, in contrast to her first years in the school.

A deputy head and another senior teacher were interviewed. They both referred to 'having a say' and 'being able to get a sense of the big picture'. They both alluded to understanding what had had to be done to ensure the survival of the school. The picture they painted was of involvement but also of control from Andrea who, they said, insisted that certain initiatives took priority. It was clear from the development plan that senior staff were closely involved in writing the development plan and were accountable for successful implementation in key areas. There was no evidence that they actually played a part in developing the school's agenda for change. They did not refer to this in the way that other senior staff in other case

study schools did. The Ofsted report referred to Andrea's change planning and did not refer to the part played by the senior management team. This contrasted with the reports of work in other schools. These two senior staff said that their ideas were utilised, although the senior teacher said he did not always understand the purpose of some meetings, especially when a middle manager was present. This suggested that the senior staff did not perceive that their involvement was as strategic as Andrea had implied.

Students

Boosting student esteem and aspiration was a challenge from the start. 'The students were conservative' she recalled. They referred to environmental improvements as 'making the school too good for us' and covered newly introduced plants in Tippex until they became used to them. Involving students in a student council which could make some decisions was an early initiative. During the period of the amalgamation there were students from the other school to integrate. This was achieved by bringing them to the new site at the beginning of year 10. As the numbers were not high, Andrea felt it was manageable.

Andrea also talked about how difficult it was to involve students in the way that she wanted, because of the challenging nature of some of the families. The deputy and senior teacher shared this perception. The deputy referred to the importance of working with families to help students to succeed, particularly the students 'who have nothing for them at home'. Both talked of having to attend many community functions. The senior teacher spoke about the difficulty of involving large numbers in extra curricular activities, despite an enormous effort by staff. Andrea said that she thought that students' expectations of themselves had risen since the early days of her headship and cited, as evidence, attitudes in lessons and more participation in clubs and trips. The senior staff were not sure that progress was significant and did not report such a shift in ethos. They were all in agreement that a number of students

wanted emotional and social support from school and that there was the potential for conflict between this desire and the requirement that the school improve examination performance.

Parents

Parents were presented with opportunities to understand changes at the school and to participate in the work of the school. They were not, Andrea suggested, ready or confident enough to engage with the school in the way that she wanted and appeared to have other priorities. Not only did she not get positive responses to invitations to curriculum evenings or questionnaires seeking their views, she met active resistance and even hostility. The latter came from parents who felt that her expectations were inappropriate for their children (meeting uniform requirements, completing homework) or from parents who were opposed to the amalgamation. She did record some success in persuading small groups and individuals to attend 'drop-in' sessions during the day. She mentioned a slowly increasing involvement based on small networks.

Governors

Andrea referred to the way in which she provided the governing body with detailed information both to enable them to make decisions about the work of the school and to enable them to discharge their monitoring role. For example, the evidence from lesson observations was shared regularly, showing the improvements in standards of teaching. Andrea described how she worked closely with the governors, advising them on committee structures and operating procedures, and providing information and guidance for committees. She shared this work with some senior staff.

Performance

The Ofsted report applauded Andrea's clear sense of direction. There was also a strong reference to the lucid quality of her planning and the active use of target setting. The report

also confirmed the socio-economic context of the school, including the large number of disadvantaged families and high proportion of students with special educational needs. This provided the background to the variety of judgements. Standards were below national norms, there was some unsatisfactory teaching and what were described as unacceptably low levels of attendance. The school was, on the other hand, described as well-resourced and providing value for money.

The Ofsted report praised the quality of school development planning and the monitoring of teaching and learning. The report attributed much of the planning and strategic work to Andrea's input. The school development plan was extensive and very specific in its objectives and the way responsibilities were allocated.

Andrea said that she saw the school had become more outgoing than when she arrived. She felt – confirmed by the monitoring – that expectations were higher than before. However, she was concerned that examination results were still a problem and had to improve. Her view was that the quality of teaching, as assessed through the school's monitoring system, was 'worth 30 % five or more A*-C grades', despite the consistently lower performance. She still emphasised the need to improve and expressed her frustration with the slow progress.

Preparation

Andrea was convinced that her dual role as deputy head and LEA adviser had provided a good preparation for headship. She had learnt to cope with long hours and to focus on priorities. She applauded practical management courses that helped to develop efficient time management techniques. She expressed doubts about the capacity of a course to prepare for headship although training was always helpful. She valued rather the lessons she had learnt while in post.

Andrea referred to how much she thought she had learnt at the school. She had learnt about influencing people, about what she called the ‘ hearts and minds business’. The head had to be a ‘motivator’, she said, who could conceptualise the vision and the agenda and communicate them in manageable quantities, ‘chunk it down’ as she put it. Andrea saw herself as personally driving forward this agenda and felt that a lot depended on her. She had to be emotionally resilient, saying ‘I have to be cheerful or they wonder what is wrong.’

She had learnt to manage her workload by putting in long hours at school rather than taking a lot of work home. She eased the stress by listening to music in the office when she worked late and in the car on the way home. She also found regular dialogue with the Chair of Governors a good way of maintaining a sense of balance. She shared issues and problems openly – like the attendance problem and the slow rate of improvement against targets, which also featured in a governors’ report to parents.

At the time of the revisit, Andrea was both pleased with progress and frustrated by the intractable nature of some issues. She derived benefit from sharing with senior staff and was looking forward to the completion of the building programme. She still spoke of the role as a highly demanding solo act.

School context

Brian was head of a local authority maintained (community) school. There were, according to the Ofsted report, 1331 students on roll of whom 28% were on the Special Educational Needs register. 484 came from wards that were classed as among the 10% most deprived in the health authority area and 365 came from a ward classed as among the 105 most deprived nationally. 16% were in receipt of free school meals and 8.5% came from minority ethnic backgrounds. The ability profile of the school's intake, principally as a result of these factors, was below average, although there was a number of students – about 22% of the school roll – who were said to be of above average ability. This represented, therefore, a diverse student and parent body.

There were variations in the school's examination performance in relation to national norms. GCSE results were generally below average although nearer to the national average in the upper grades, notably A*. A level results were deemed by Ofsted to be very good and the school's SATs results in Maths reached the national average with English and Maths scoring at a slightly lower level.

Brian had already served seven years as a head in another school. He succeeded a head who had been ill for a number of years. There were budget problems and the school lacked a sense of momentum. Brian referred to how it felt as if it had 'gone to sleep'. The school's first Ofsted report had not been favourable. Brian was interviewed (in 1997) during his third year in post and just before the school's second Ofsted inspection. The revisit took place three years later when the school roll had increased to over 1400.

Brian talked of his early days in the school in terms of fact finding and teambuilding. His visits to classrooms, discussions with staff and observations of the school in action convinced him of the need to rid the school of 'a secondary modern feeling'. He judged, he said, that the school required strategic leadership from a strong senior management team. He described how the group of managers that he had inherited did not work together, rather kept to their own separate tasks. He indicated that he was able to implement solutions to the school's budget problems that included enabling some senior staff and others to receive generous retirement or redundancy packages. This meant that he was able to make significant staff changes both in terms of internal promotions and new appointments.

Brian stated emphatically his belief that senior staff should play a significant role in the school's strategic thinking and planning and that they should take a lead in implementation. He saw it as his job to lead the team in this process but he was very clear that the team had to operate holistically. This implied overlapping job briefs designed to strengthen the ethos of collective responsibility and enable them to work closely together 'so that you can't see the joins'.

The Ofsted report emphasised the part played by Brian's senior team in planning and implementing change. That report also referred to the way in which Brian led by example both by working alongside people in their classrooms and by working with senior staff to improve the performance of the heads of department. This approach contributed to the creation of the team ethos, the shared setting of priorities and the collegial style of working with staff that was recognised by Ofsted as having enabled many improvements to take place in the school. Brian mentioned some cultural changes that he had seen as essential to resolve tensions and contradictions in the way the school operated. One example was the staff forum

that met to tackle issues of staff concern. The tradition was that no senior staff were present. However, as Brian pointed out, they needed to be there to offer solutions. At the time of the interview he had only succeeded in securing an invitation for himself. By the time of the revisit, deputy heads were involved.

During the revisit interview Brian also referred to the fact that the school was facing some difficult issues. He alluded to the problems experienced by some of the heads of year, following from the previous year's reorganisation from a house system. In addition, he talked for some time about the way the catchment area and intake were changing because of demographic shifts in the city and the adverse effect this was having on the ability profile of the pupils in the primary schools. The need to both make changes and respond to external factors was just as pressing as when he arrived, leading him to talk of cycles of change. The school had improved but plans for more changes were important to maintain progress.

Brian's change strategies did not just involve staff teams. He also spent time endeavouring to boost the expectations that staff had of students and that students had of themselves. He spent time talking to students about what they might achieve and to staff about the impact on students of the nature of the curriculum. Brian's strategies included the development of his own perspective which was then worked on with senior staff to generate the plans. He spoke of being sufficiently experienced to judge what was really significant and of having the confidence to know what was important: 'you have the comfort of knowing that there are certain things you can ignore'.

Brian stressed the importance of the development of the senior staff team not only as a strategy to bring about change but also as the best way of running the school. He believed that all aspects of the leadership and management of the school should be worked on collaboratively and so devoted time and energy to developing this work and monitoring its effectiveness. He expressed pleasure in the way the team worked together. Some of the new members that he was able to appoint during his first year moved on to promoted posts and he had to develop the team again with the mixture of new and experienced staff. The deputy heads who were interviewed offered the perception that they were indeed a team who thought and planned together.

The deputies went on to talk about the agendas for their regular meetings which offered every opportunity to share the forward planning. They also indicated that their job descriptions worked in the same way. They each led on an area that others were involved in so they all led and contributed in turn. The deputies did, however, express some disappointment in the fact that they were unable to work as strategically as they wanted or felt that they should. They talked of having to spend a disproportionate amount of time 'firefighting' or solving day to day problems. They had to do this in certain departments and with certain heads of year. They also stated that this need to respond to crises affected the quality of the senior staff meetings.

Brian and the senior staff were involved in motivating heads of department as part of the early work to raise standards. They were trying to encourage quality curriculum development to try to improve the students' learning experience. Brian and the senior staff were trying to help staff to understand how the quality of the curriculum affected students' responses in term of behaviour and motivation. There were also improvements in the building and the facilities which were designed to improve the conditions for everyone. Brian spoke ruefully of the way

in which even systematically planned change and improvement in conditions destabilised some staff who found it difficult to adjust.

Students

Brian referred to the diversity of aspiration within the student body. There were the underachievers who lacked motivation and needed a more stimulating and challenging curriculum. Some of these responded to the changes in the school and contributed to the improvement in results. Some, particularly the Muslim minority, needed to feel included and Brian spent time with them at lunchtimes when he first arrived. The deputies reported that there was still a culture in the school of students who claimed that they were not interested in gaining qualifications. There were students from a variety of backgrounds and ethnic origins who took part in the extensive extra curricular programme and were motivated but the challenge of maximising attainment was still high on the agenda.

Parents

At the interview Brian described a stable community served by the school consisting of conventional families who could be encouraged to aspire to achieve more. His comments in response to the summary of the interview (member check) pointed out that there were some signs of increasing population mobility in the area. Brian and his deputies talked, on the occasion of the revisit, of how there seemed to be an increasing number of 'awkward' parents by which they meant parents who were not prepared to accept the school's expectations in terms of dress, conduct and schoolwork. In addition, they were confrontational and, the deputies stressed, abusive at times. The challenge of dealing with these parents was that, because of the difficulties of recruiting staff, things would go wrong in the school which would give the same parents just cause for complaint. The deputies cited problems with the

performance of year heads, the lack of modern linguists and problems arising from insufficient staff consistency across the school.

Governors

Brian's initial work with the governing body indicated, he said, that they had felt uninformed and were therefore very tentative in the way in which they contributed to debate. He talked of his determination to provide information to increase the governors' knowledge about the school's curriculum and finances and about their own responsibilities for monitoring the work and performance of the school. Brian alluded to the way that the Chair of Governors, who was incumbent when Brian arrived at the school, had retired from work and therefore had so much time that he occupied himself in school as if he were a part time member of staff. Not only did Brian feel that he had to build up the confidence of the majority of the governors, he also had to endeavour to 'rein in' the Chair. An example of his over zealousness was the time when he attended a senior staff meeting about the year nine curriculum and started to argue with staff about operational issues. Brian talked of how it 'ruined the meeting'.

Ultimately, Brian was compelled to express forcibly his disquiet about what he was clear was interference. Despite Brian's excellent interpersonal skills, emphasised by the deputies, there was a row between Brian and the Chair of Governors. A new Chair developed her knowledge and skills to the extent that, when Brian was revisited, he spoke of his regret that she was leaving the area because of promotion at work. He said that they would have to replace her with another 'trained' person. He resolved to try to 'play it safe' in future by making clear which issues governors should monitor carefully.

In general, Brian had tried to involve the governors in discussion as much as possible. However, he talked wryly about how this also caused him a little difficulty when he mentioned a small budget surplus and asked them how they would like to spend the money. The led to a long debate, showing how much better it would have been to have tabled a proposal.

Performance

Brian talked of a number of successes. The examination results had improved. The number on roll had grown, there had been a building programme including refurbishment and a new wing. The school had developed some productive community links. Relationships with feeder schools were good, partly as a result of Brain's response to their expectation of leadership from him. Brian was pleased with the school's place in the local community although concerned at the way it was becoming less stable with fewer residents showing a long term commitment to the area. The other successes were the sound budget and the increase in extra curricular activity.

Preparation

Brian referred to his preparation for headship as principally consisting of learning from experience, a trend which continued in headship. He said that, as a deputy, working with other senior staff provided a good opportunity to learn. He valued what he had learnt from colleagues over the years. The place of a theoretical qualification was that it could be useful in helping make better sense of this experience.

Brian saw it as vital for the head to have good relationships with a wide variety of people. The head had to be able to persuade people to change, like heads of department being asked to

make curriculum changes. Headship for Brian was concerned with the politics of working with staff in the context of their everyday politics. He thought that the head needed to be a bit of a chameleon who was good at adapting and blending in to the scene.

Heads also have to be able to analyse and focus rapidly on the most important issues, according to Brian. Such intellectual qualities are vital for planning, delegating and monitoring and for responding to events and proposals. The head's reactions should also be in harmony with strongly held principles, applied carefully, taking into account the need to identify appropriate tactics through the rapid analysis of circumstances.

Brian accepted that as a head he was, to an extent, set apart, despite the nature of the teamwork with senior staff. The isolation was mitigated by ways of working. He set himself termly targets so that he could identify personal progress and maintain a sense of priorities. He needed to be able to look ahead, to anticipate, plan tactically and provide clear direction for others. The change to the year system from the house system was a change that had been planned to follow other changes.

The head had to be able to motivate him or herself and find ways to perpetually recharge batteries. Brian found the work with colleagues rejuvenating and the successes rewarding. He did also say that he was finding the relentless demands ever more taxing, especially given the way the local conditions were changing.

Cathy

School context

Cathy was head of a Grant Maintained (Foundation) school serving an area that was balanced in terms of housing and parental background, providing the school with an intake with, according to Cathy, an ability profile not far below the national average. According to the school's Ofsted report the school was oversubscribed, admitting students from eleven primary schools. The school roll numbered 1141, there were 3% students with special needs, either statemented or on the register at stage 3. Around 20% were eligible for free school meals. There were students with educational and social needs within this 'balanced' intake which was 'skewed to lower ability' (Ofsted).

According to Ofsted, the school's standards represented a mixture of underperformance, improving subjects and some departments that were good because they were producing results that were at or above the national average. There had been some pronounced recent improvements in overall GCSE results. At A level there were many students gaining A and B grades. Attendance rates did not present a major problem. Key Stage 3 performance was described as 'variable' (Ofsted).

Cathy's previous experience was of serving as a deputy head and as an LEA adviser providing management training. She embarked on her headship with both senior management experience in a school and experience of supporting and assessing heads from outside the school. She talked of wanting to invent her own version of headship which she characterised as combining financial management and general efficiency with a down to earth view of the needs of young people and adults.

Cathy recounted the history of a school that had had good results and been popular and then appeared to lose its way. She talked of how the Local Education Authority representatives at the interview made clear their concerns about the school's underachievement. Cathy was also troubled by the air of neglect and misery which affected the building, the standards of student dress and conduct and the atmosphere among the staff.

She was interviewed (in 1997) six years after she took up her post, about eighteen months after the publication of the Ofsted report. That report highlighted her impact in terms of 'exceptionally good staff relationships' and 'parental pride in the work of the headteacher'. Two years later, at the point of the revisit, Cathy was about to move on to a new post. She summarised the progress the school had made and noted the departments that had not yet made sufficient progress. She expressed some disappointment at some recent examination results that represented a temporary faltering in the improvement trend. She was also taken aback by the criticism from some staff of the fact that she was leaving for another headship. The deputy head and senior teacher confirmed the view that Cathy had led the school through some significant and meaningful changes.

Strategies for change

Cathy used her assessment, based on the interaction between her experience and the insights gained from the interview for the post, of the needs of the school to put together a vision of a school where staff worked together to provide for the young people. She talked repeatedly about the importance of the 'school climate'. In order to give staff the feeling that their views were valued, Cathy described how she established a large number of working groups. She made it clear that she had defined a good school as one where everyone was involved and achieved, and that that vision was not negotiable. The working groups were charged with developing the means to realise the vision. Cathy set up so many as a deliberate strategy to

counter the impact of the negative climate – she said that she ‘went overboard’ with involvement.

A contributory factor to what Cathy called the ‘poor staff climate’ was the power wielded by two very able deputy heads who, Cathy suggested, had been allowed, by the lack of concerted leadership under the previous regime, to create rival power bases. On the first training day Cathy asked these deputies to make coffee for the staff. This action symbolised the new regime. The new head was taking firm control and introducing a more collegial way of working.

Cathy deployed a range of tactics to bring about changes. She moved away from the collegial way of working once she saw that staff were becoming tired of it, realising that they were feeling that their workload did not allow for so many meetings. She was prepared to be more directive when she perceived that it was necessary to tell people what was expected. She spoke of how she was not so comfortable with this way of working but was sure that the decision was right in the circumstances. This approach was also necessary, she said, because of the way external government requirements were growing steadily. The deputy head confirmed that Cathy had indeed revolutionised the atmosphere in the school. He also agreed with her change of tactic to deal with the less responsive departments.

Staff

It was necessary, Cathy emphasised, to develop strong staff teams to improve the work of the school. The senior management team had to be created. Cathy had inherited the two powerful deputies, a new deputy and two senior teachers. She recognised the ability of the deputies and resolved that they should move on. She therefore decided to help them ‘get headships’. She was successful and so was able to give the relatively new deputy the chance to flourish,

appoint a new deputy and offer development opportunities to the senior teacher. The senior teacher referred to the way he moved into a whole school role away from a function that only concerned work with students. He confirmed that he felt involved in all aspects of the work of the school and in making decisions. Cathy's assessment of the progress made was that the team now worked together closely in meetings and consisted of individuals who took forward the decisions within the framework agreed in the meetings. She did also say that she thought they were still dependent on her for ideas 'I am an ideas person, I always have loads'.

Cathy also worked, with and through senior staff, on the development of the curriculum and other teams within the school. The deputy head made very clear that Cathy had invested in what he called 'building the school solidly' by working on creating good relationships, emphasising the quality of teaching and supporting the development of effective teaching teams. Cathy's evaluation of progress was that some teams were much more successful than others.

Cathy involved support staff in working groups and in changes. She established two staff forums – one for teachers and one for support staff. These forums were asked to comment on draft proposals, for example, certain budget items. She also sought the views of other staff she trusted. For example, she sought the views of the Head of Sixth about standards of uniform. She talked warmly of the progress that she considered had been made with consultation and team building and of the way in which she had taken a particular interest in the development of staff who were committed to staying in the school. The area of difficulty for her was dealing with weak staff and conveying some difficult messages at times. She described dealing with poor performance as one of the 'most challenging aspects' of headship.

Students

Cathy said that she thought that students wanted to be known, welcomed, cared for, to feel secure and enjoy the social side of school. They also expected to do some learning and to be part of a system that worked. Staff and school were concentrated on standards whereas students had wider concerns. Part of the work on improving the school climate entailed developing approaches to dealing with bullying and poor behaviour. Cathy talked of the creation of the open climate as part of dealing with bullying. The senior teacher talked of how the students did feel that they were known and that they could talk to people, including Cathy.

When she was revisited, Cathy referred to an increase in the number of students who were presenting more challenging behaviour. She described them as resisting support from staff within the school and failing to respond to corrective measures when they were applied. Cathy was concerned that the progress that had been made in improving behaviour was not secure and that the process of tackling it in a concerted way might have to be repeated.

Parents

There were links between work with students and work with parents. Cathy set out clear expectations of students in terms of behaviour. She temporarily excluded those who did not conform. Her message to parents, however, was that if they came into school promptly and were thoroughly supportive, the exclusion period could be curtailed. Cathy had identified that parental concerns were: student behaviour; responses from staff; and standards of uniform. She devised a concentrated programme of work with parents. In addition to the work on behaviour, she introduced a more distinctive uniform, stressed homework, involved parents in celebrating success through an increased number of rewards evenings and insisted that staff should return calls from parents within 24 hours. Cathy's view was that the work with parents was very successful. The Ofsted report referred to parents having 'pride in the work of the headteacher'.

Governors

Cathy depicted a clearly defined working relationship with her governing body. She commented that she expected the governors to monitor her work and to ask questions. She said that she found the governors supportive and prepared to understand the nature of the successes and setbacks. She talked of encouraging them to use their committee structure to ensure that they were informed about the school's progress and to delegate the work to the committees in the interests of efficiency. Cathy recalled the way in which the examination results were slow to improve but that the governors were prepared to listen to the reasons and appreciate the importance of investing in long term improvement. She was very open with them about which subject departments were improving and which were not, encouraging them to ask questions and so contribute to improvement.

Performance

Cathy measured her own performance against a number of school indicators. She sought improvements in examination results while recognising that they would take time to realise. She reported to governors that levels of attainment had improved and were much nearer to the national average. She had been chastened by the dip in examination performance that had occurred after the interview and before the revisit but had also recognised the contributory factors such as the ability of the year group and the areas of the school that had not yet improved. She talked of the adverse impact on her confidence of brought about by the dip in performance levels and the criticism she attracted from staff when she announced her departure for another post.

Cathy talked with pleasure at progress with examination performance, with monitoring and assessing achievement and with developing good working practices and relationships in the school. The deputy confirmed the extent of the progress. Cathy also referred to standards that still needed to be raised and to ongoing problems with ensuring that sufficient homework was being done and with guaranteeing consistency of approach across the school.

Cathy's definition of strong performance by a school and a head was a positive reading of all of a group of performance indicators, including: finance (healthy budget); good examination results; high levels of student attendance; and being oversubscribed with applicants to join the school. The report from the Ofsted inspection described the school as giving satisfactory value for money. This judgement reflects the picture of considerable progress and more to be done. Cathy alluded to the fact that she had been able to build on the commitment of a number of parents in the catchment area but that several cycles of change were needed to complete the job.

Preparation

Cathy referred to the effectiveness of preparation that allowed her to learn by observing others as a Local Education Authority officer. The deputy head also stressed the value of working with Cathy and the governors as a way of learning about headship. He saw the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) as a useful complement, providing a structure to help make sense of practical experience. Cathy referred to 'mixed reports' from him and others about the qualification. She agreed that formal training was useful but gave priority to the development of people skills that she said were more important than 'organising training or doing the budget'. She mentioned the importance of being able to judge the strengths and weaknesses and potential of members of staff so as to create teams that were going to work and emphasised the value in learning from experience in this instance.

Heads needed to acquire strategies to help them cope with considerable workloads. Cathy commented that she worked 'flat out during the week' and then switched off at weekends. She relied on proactive planning, careful and efficient time management and good diary keeping to keep up with the range of demands.

Cathy also talked about the need for personal confidence and emotional security. She understood the isolation of the job: 'the buck stops here' and the associated feeling that no-one else is aware of what could go wrong 'what if something happens to a child?'. Her bout of shingles just before Ofsted showed her, she affirmed, that she was not as robust as she had imagined. Nevertheless, Cathy asserted strongly the fact that the head had to have absolute faith in his or her vision and beliefs. Conviction, she suggested, was the source of charisma. The head had to create and convey a sense of certainty about the success of his or her school so as to take the school forward and keep things going through 'good and bad times'. The head needed 'almost pigheaded confidence', said Cathy.

Cathy alluded to the importance of the head's degree of personal security. She appreciated her own independence and resilience and saw them as critical to her success, along with her good relationship with staff. She also appreciated how supportive her husband was. He encouraged her to apply for posts and look for her next move, recognising her need to seek a challenge and variety at work. She found him very supportive in times of pressure. It was in this context that she was moving to a challenging new post.

Derek

School context

Derek was head of a Local Authority maintained (community) comprehensive school in a town where there were several such schools and where there were school places surplus to requirement. Whereas Derek's school had been popular at one time, as more schools had opened and changes occurred in the local demography, the esteem in which it was held had diminished. His predecessor had not adopted a competitive approach and, by the time Derek took over, changes in social conditions, population decline and marketing by other schools in more favoured parts of the town meant that the role was falling quite sharply.

The report from the Ofsted inspection, that took place nine weeks after Derek took up his post in 1995, observed 'As numbers have declined, the proportion of students with special educational needs has increased'. The area served by the school was not poor. According to the Ofsted report the families 'compare favourably with national average figures in relation to employment'. Relative to the rest of the town, however, it was the least favoured in socio economic terms. This was illustrated by the identification of over 30% of the cohort of 600 students as having special educational needs. Attendance and GCSE performance were below the national average and described by Ofsted as requiring particular attention.

Derek had come from a deputy headship where he had, as he indicated, felt very supported. He was used to working in a team where people complemented each others' skills. Prior to his deputy headship he had held a variety of posts in two schools. He had taught in the same area for his entire career. He was interviewed in 1998 at the end of his third year at the school and revisited a year later just before he left for another headship. He did not speak warmly of his time at the school, having found the job very lonely after his experience of deputy headship.

The Ofsted report had highlighted some good teaching but a total lack of planning or concerted leadership. Derek did not feel able to use the Ofsted report, describing it as 'bland', to justify bringing about rapid and radical change. This was partly because, he said, of the difficulty he encountered in creating teamwork at senior level and as a result of his temperament. He talked of himself as someone who liked to move carefully and do things thoroughly. This case study is of a head who found it very difficult to operate effectively within the context of this school.

Strategies for Change

Derek spent his first weeks in the job trying to get to know people and preparing for the Ofsted inspection. He learnt from this experience that the school had no effective and up to date data recording systems to enable him to 'number crunch' for Ofsted and he had to produce much of it manually. He had hoped that the Ofsted report would map out some priorities for him but his view of the report was that it did not provide a strong enough lead.

Derek talked about how difficult he found it to prioritise as a head. The Ofsted report did make clear that the new leadership (which really meant Derek) would need to provide the lead in order to introduce the clarity of planning and the sense of direction that was reported as lacking. Derek spoke of how he did not feel equipped to do this without the help and support of the senior team. The Ofsted report did not provide him with any assistance with changing a group of individuals who refused to work together into an effective team.

Derek referred to the burden of being expected to change the school just by being the new head. He perceived that the staff did not expect to play a part. He described their expectations of him as 'almost messianic' and 'quite frightening'. He identified some basic practices that required improvement. These included the management of finance, both the systems and the level of expenditure, and the recording and use of student performance data. Derek was able to put the systems into place and then attempt to persuade staff to use those systems. Standards had to be raised in order to improve performance. In order to achieve this Derek created a group of key heads of department and educated them in the use of performance data so that they would start to set targets for students. Derek's strategies, as outlined at the interview, were to work to influence groups of staff and individuals. He said that he wanted to introduce changes steadily by bringing in new systems and then working with small groups at the start. This did not, he recorded both in the interview and at the revisit, accord with the expectation that there would be rapid and spectacular change from the new head or 'messiah'. Derek described these expectations as unreasonable but did reflect, at the revisit, that looking back he thought he could have insisted on more rapid progress.

Staff

Derek identified several major issues in relation to staff. The most difficult was challenge posed by the nature of the senior staff, the deputies and senior teachers. Derek knew that one of the deputies had unsuccessfully applied for the headship and so he would have to tread carefully. He opted for suggesting a social event involving the whole team and partners. He had valued the social contact within the team in his previous post and judged it to be a good way of breaking down barriers. He also thought that a gathering at his house would enable the team members to 'see where I come from'. He rapidly discovered, after it proved impossible to arrange such an event, that the members of the team were unwilling to work together and that some of their partners would not 'be in the same room together'. The senior staff

themselves did not seem to expect collective involvement in shaping the work of the school.

Derek said he had to abandon the idea of creating a cohesive team and engaged the services of a senior LEA officer to assist him with the appraisal of each individual, so that he could expect a reasonable standard of work from each member.

This tactic did result in some useful team meetings although the individuals still worked in isolation for most of the time. The other outcome was an improvement in the performance of the senior teachers. The deputies were capable, Derek stressed, in their own right but the senior teachers needed help with appreciating the whole school agenda. One of the senior teachers and one of the deputies did also say to him privately that they would make more progress if they worked together, although as individuals they did not offer to help bring this about.

The deputy head who was interviewed was not the deputy who had applied for the headship. She recognised that they could have done more to support Derek so that things could have moved forward more rapidly, but she described the other deputy as particularly difficult to work with and stated that she thought that Derek ought to have tackled this issue directly.

Derek described how he could see the strengths in both and tried to build a rapport with both. Derek kept referring to the way he personally needed input and reassurance from senior staff that the school was moving in the right direction. This was not compatible, for him, with creating the potential for conflict with them. At the revisit he admitted that he should have done more to enable the other senior staff to flourish by being more explicit with the disappointed deputy. This was highlighted for him by his conduct when the governors did not ask him to be acting head for the term before Derek's replacement arrived.

Another staffing issue was the quality of leadership from middle managers, in particular Heads of Department. The falling school roll and the budget deficit that Derek inherited entailed making four staff redundant at the end of his first term. He knew, therefore, that he had to work with the staff in post. There did not seem, to Derek, to be a meaningful management structure in the school. Almost half of the staff were managers of departments, subjects, year groups or other activities. He required a smaller group to take forward performance issues. He reported on some pleasing progress with a group of key heads of department who grasped how they should manage budgets that had been delegated to their departments. The same staff were also trained in using performance data and were showing signs of becoming engaged with the business of setting student targets.

Derek was still very concerned about staff expectations. Many were not prepared to accept either their responsibility for working with students with special needs or the fact that some of the students were capable of doing well but needed plenty of encouragement. Many also expected all student behaviour problems to be resolved through punishment. Derek talked of reducing the amount of 'shouting outside my office', which had been a daily feature of the work of one of the senior teachers. Derek realised that a culture of achievement could not be developed in climate of repression. However, the skills of some of the staff were, in his view, limited and so they readily demanded solutions from others to difficulties with students and there was no real sharing of the responsibility for student behaviour among all staff. In terms of teaching staff, there was some potential to develop people but Derek saw it as limited. He felt that he had little choice, however, because of the budget, to do other than maintain the status quo.

Students

Derek described how he spent time talking to students when on dinner duty. As a pastoral deputy he had enjoyed working with students. He detected their low self esteem and their lack of confidence in their capacity to make a success of school. He endeavoured to work with the whole student body by taking assemblies and trying to make those into positive occasions. He also allowed one group who felt particularly insecure in the school to create a common room by decorating and equipping the room with his support. Their low expectations of themselves were compounded, he said, by the attitudes of many of the parents.

Parents

Derek recalled the keen interest taken by parents of students at his previous school. He found the lack of interest, co-operation and response from the parents at this school a source of real difficulty. Indeed, at the revisit, he talked of looking forward to going to a school where he would not have to deal with so many 'chaotic families'. Since there was, according to Derek, agreement between the school and the Local Education Authority that concerted work was needed with parents, a project was developed in conjunction with Cambridge University to provide study support for students and involve parents. However, Derek reported how few year 10 parents turned up to the meeting, even after they had been urged to attend by the Chair of Governors. This lack of response from parents perpetuated, Derek stressed, a cycle of low self esteem in students and low expectations on the part of teaching staff. He recognised that the parents lacked confidence and had other pressing priorities in terms of dealing with family and other difficulties. He expressed frustration at the fact that even a special project failed to engage them.

Derek recounted how he felt secure and comfortable with his governors. He attributed this to the fact that he was working as he had said he would in his interview for the post. They seemed to him to take the view that they had appointed him, they had confidence in him and were supporting him as he attempted to meet the challenges. They even supported him in his application for another headship, which he described as 'sporting'.

Performance

Derek and his deputy both talked independently of their frustration at the fact that even when the percentage of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades increased to over 30%, as they were still bottom of the local league table, they were still regarded as failing. This meant that they still struggled to recruit students. The impact on the nature of the intake as noted by Ofsted continued to have an effect. A falling roll brought ongoing budget problems which Derek did his best to anticipate so as to avoid the deficit situation he had inherited. The nature of the school's position appeared to mean that, as the school was not popular, it became increasingly difficult to make major improvements. The school was not seen as providing value for money in terms of the quality of the teaching and learning and the outputs like examination results and levels of student attendance. Yet it could not easily invest in major staff changes without the resources. Work with parents that Derek had hoped would engender some local commitment which would, in turn, stimulate, for example, higher levels of student attendance and co-operation, did not attract support. At the revisit Derek talked of feeling that there was little hope. The only positive development had been the agreement at last from the Local Education Authority that some new facilities would be forthcoming. Derek hoped that in the long term this would help to make the school more attractive. He did not feel that he could wait for that.

Derek had been a pastoral deputy who had 'kept in touch with the curriculum'. He talked of feeling that he needed greater breadth, more experience of all aspects of running the school, in order to feel more secure in working with difficult middle managers and senior staff. He stressed how difficult he found prioritising and wanted more guidance. Derek reflected his family's view of the workload recalling when his son asked 'are we going to see you this week, dad?'. He found the isolation very daunting, he had not been used as a deputy to the feeling of being 'set apart' from the rest of the staff. He felt that he brought an essential generosity of nature to the post but that he lacked sufficient confidence, suggesting that the kind of confidence needed bordered on 'arrogance'.

When Derek responded to the summary interview (the member check) he commented on the way staff expected him to be able to solve all their problems and that he did not feel he could escape the feeling of failure in their eyes because this was inevitably not going to happen. At the revisit, Derek reviewed what he had expected to achieve and had talked of during the interview. He had hoped to promote effective leadership by middle managers, to see staff taking responsibility for quality, to improve levels of attainment, to introduce good pastoral care and use data to set student targets. He would also have liked to have made progress with staffing and other problems. The deputy who was interviewed said that she thought that there had been some good initiatives but that the pace had been too slow and some obstacles had been allowed to remain. Derek's conclusion was that he had not been ready for what he had to face. In particular he had struggled to retain an overview to determine pace and priorities. He had also not felt confident enough to move decisively even when he was displeasing some people. He referred to taking these lessons forward to his new post.

School context

Ed was head of a Grant Maintained (Foundation) school in a town served by two secondary schools. There was some rivalry but, as the town had expanded, Ed recorded that the competition was not fierce given that there were enough students to fill both schools. Ed's school had grown and there had been a building programme designed both to accommodate the numbers and to modernise the school. The Ofsted report dated from Ed's eighth year at the school and reflected many changes to the way the school was run which were deemed to have yielded positive outcomes.

The school attracted students from right across the ability range. While only a small proportion of students had statements of special education needs, 28% were registered as having some kind of need and 10% were seen as needing help with emotional or behavioural difficulties. This represented a slight weighting towards pupils with special needs. The Ofsted report referred to the intake as 'from the full range of social and economic backgrounds' and to some students who came from areas of social and economic deprivation. 14% were entitled to receive free school meals. The school was reported to be performing broadly in line with national averages. At Key stage 3 performance was at or above national averages. At GCSE the percentage of students achieving five or more good GCESs was just below national average while the A level points score was almost in line with national averages.

Ed was the longest serving head in the study. He had been in post for eleven years when he was interviewed (2000). The revisit took place a year later. This was his first and only headship. Ed was able to recall very clearly his early days at the school and talked of the changes he had initiated having taken over from a head who had made school finance a

priority over people and had not built staff teams..The Ofsted report had marked another starting point for innovation, stimulating an agenda which included striving for more consistent monitoring, better use of assessment and developing the work of middle managers, especially heads of department. The Ofsted report also recorded what had been achieved, noting 'with the full support of the governing body, the headteacher has encouraged the wider involvement of staff within the whole-school management, specifically to improve the levels of responsibility and decision-making within the middle manager posts'. When Ed was interviewed he was still exercised about the effectiveness of the heads of department and on the occasion of the revisit was able to report continuing modest progress.

Interviewing a head who had been in post for some time revealed the cyclical nature of aspects of the work. One of the advantages of the local growth had been an improvement in the balance of ability in the intake to the school. One of Ed's concerns at both the interview and the revisit was the reversal of this resulting from a series of local demographic shifts. His other ongoing concern, despite his years of experience was the volume of work and need to 'keep all the plates spinning'.

Strategies for change

Ed took over, he said, from a head who insisted on a very overbearing and formal atmosphere and did not promote team building, rather concentrated on financial management. Ed described himself as outgoing and the style he adopted was a collegial way of working. This was expressed through the development of ways of involving staff through new structures. It was also manifested through the creation of more personal working relationships. For example, he did not want to be called 'head' and said so. Eleven years later there were still one or two who did call him 'head'. Likewise, in his predecessor's days no-one had been allowed into the head's office whereas Ed tried to welcome all staff. Again, eleven years later,

there were still one or two who spoke to him from the doorway. He saw the use of his name and the welcome to the office as symbols of the way his approach was different.

Ed's work to change the structures involved three aspects. Firstly he brought the senior managers together into a team. Initially he worked to bring out the best in the staff in post and, as opportunities arose, appointed some new members. He reported a positive response to the new involvement not only in decision-making but in the identification of the priorities for discussion. This allowed the senior management to set the agenda with the head. This enabled the team collectively to establish the structure for consultation that involved staff at all levels and was applauded by Ofsted. This continued to be a feature of the way the school operated and was described by both the senior staff who were interviewed – one of whom was an original member and one (the deputy) was new.

As well as changing the way the staff worked, starting with the senior managers, Ed described two other major change initiatives. One related to the buildings. As head of a Grant Maintained school, Ed had access to the capacity to bid for funds from the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS). He identified a modernisation plan and sought to attract the relevant grants. At the same time, the Local Education Authority and the FAS identified the need to provide for some additional secondary school places in the area. There was space at Ed's school and so a programme was developed that combined new building and refurbishment. He had to oversee the implementation to ensure that the new facilities were appropriate to the school's needs and that the construction work did not disrupt the school excessively.

The other initiative concerned the use of pupil performance data. When he originally took up his post, Ed introduced the staff to the use of prior attainment data. As this type of work was not used in every secondary school at this stage, it was a new way of working that was viewed as an initiative rather than a requirement. It did enable the school to improve performance in examinations. However, progress was not uniform, depending on the attitude of the head of department. When he was revisited, Ed talked of making it obligatory that departmental heads took the data seriously and made sure as far as possible, that students attained their targets. He spoke of insisting that they change 'may' to 'will' in their plans to improve results.

As a long serving head Ed saw change as occurring in cycles where the same ground had to be covered repeatedly in different ways. He cited the introduction and revisiting of the use of student performance data as an example. He spoke of the head's role as encompassing the leadership and management of these continuous cycles of change and referred to the challenge of sustaining this role personally. The reputation of the school had also to be sustained through the process of continuous change which involved communicating the nature and purpose of the changes carefully. Ed communicated his resentment of the level of government imposed changes which overlaid this process. He was not talking particularly about policies which might well relate to the school's change agenda, rather pieces of work that had to be produced at short notice like the completion of the assessment of the threshold applications or bids for funds.

Staff

Ed recalled how he spent his early years developing the senior staff team he had inherited. He - and they - talked of the genuine dynamic that existed that allowed the work of the school to be led and driven by the efforts of the team as a whole. The newer senior staff were in accord with the established members over this. The mixture of newer and very established members

worked well, Ed observed. The newer members were, according to the deputy, excited by their career prospects and acutely aware of the demands of headship. The area that still required work was the lack of consistency at times when they worked with staff groups, particularly when they were line managing departments. Ed and his deputy both referred to this at the time of the revisit and Ed had mentioned it in the interview.

Work with the middle managers was described in terms of targets and autonomy. The targets were primarily concerned with examination performance at GCSE and A level, with the core subjects also attracting Key Stage 3 targets. The practice was well established in the school. Some departments had accepted their responsibility to achieve their targets and devised successful strategies. They were described as being allowed the freedom to continue to determine how to meet the set objectives and how they wanted to operate within the school framework.

The successful departments accepted the targets, worked with the staff and achieved the results, according to Ed and his deputy. The less effective departments disputed the targets, appeared to be unable to generate solutions within the staff teams and could not therefore operate without a good deal of guidance. Ed cited the example of the member of staff who left the classroom door unlocked. Students gained access and caused problems. The head of department wanted Ed to deal with the students and seemed to be unable to perceive the part played by the member of staff. Ed cited this example because he was of the view that effective middle managers, like good heads of department, are critical to good all round performance in a school.

Ed also evinced the view that all staff should be able to contribute to decision-making. He outlined an established procedure: an issue was tabled at a staff meeting; a working group was established, chaired by a senior member of staff and consisting of a mixture of junior and more senior staff and possibly a governor; the group developed proposals which were then discussed by staff discussion groups consisting of people from different departments; plans were then published for consideration at departmental and other meetings, including by governors if appropriate.

Ed indicated that this process was well used and established. He talked of his surprise at the fact that the staff took very little interest in the consultation about performance management. He wondered if this reflected their recognition of the pressure of work and the prescribed nature of external requirements from the government.

Students

They wanted to be welcomed, to feel secure and enjoy the social side of school. Ed was realistic enough to know that these were their paramount concerns. He said that they did want to be educated, to enjoy reasonable facilities and be part of a system that worked. He was concerned at the lack of consistently high expectations. There was a range of aspiration within the student body. Also there was the factor of the difference between the students' priorities and the standards agenda. Ed also recalled the way he had to arbitrate at times when students were not being realistic, for example the time when the sixth form wanted to hold a party on school premises and make alcohol available, even when some people there would be under age.

Parents

Ed referred to the increase in incidents of parents presenting hostile and aggressive behaviour.

This position was supported by the deputy and the senior teacher.

Ed also alluded to the fact that there were situations where it was not possible to convince the parents to accept in full the school's expectations. This would not be a problem if all the staff were sufficiently skilled to manage effectively all situations where the school's expectations were being enforced. This led to a situation where the viewpoint of the staff and that of the parents had to be held in balance. In addition, the nature of the catchment area was changing and more students were coming from deprived areas or families who needed support.

Difficulties with parents were on the increase, said Ed, and the largely supportive parent body was becoming more diverse.

Governors

Ed said that he thought that governors should be as well informed as possible. They should also be alerted to decisions at the earliest possible moment. In return he expected that they would appreciate the complexity of the school's work and not make superficial judgements.

He referred to the latter as 'the football manager syndrome' the apportioning of blame as soon as there were problems with performance. He stressed the volume of information he provided in comparison with his predecessor.

Performance

Ed had inherited a school where the head had emphasised financial management. He inherited sound finances and then embarked on the process of attracting investment in the school. As the roll increased, attributed to demography and the process of making the school more

attractive, so the budget increased. The resources were deployed efficiently, according to Ofsted, and as the results were also improving, the school was deemed to be providing value for money. Although there were some performance issues, including a small number of students who were poor attenders, according to Ofsted, the school was tackling these matters. Ed acknowledged that many of the performance indicators were registering in the school's favour, but also that he saw it as a fragile success. He talked of cycles of endeavour where the same problems come round again. He was anticipating the impact of the change in the intake. He was considering a return to some of his early work when, for example, senior staff had concentrated on boys' underachievement. The most important result that he wanted from performance management was a realisation on the part of all staff of the aspect for which they were individually responsible so that they would actually make that happen.

Preparation

Ed referred to the importance of experience as a deputy head in order to prepare for headship. He emphasised that a deputy should experience the full range of responsibilities and that deputy headship was 'on the job training' for headship. He suggested a project when the deputy actually became the head for a particular task or set of tasks. He was clear that he had had a wide ranging experience as a deputy and that this had enabled him to meet many challenges. He had heard 'mixed reports' of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) from his deputy. Indeed his deputy agreed over the issue of the value of personal experience. He was concerned that if he were a head he would not be able to handle finance unless he had had it 'as part of his brief' as a deputy. In fact he did not perceive the NPQH as helpful; rather he saw it as a hurdle. He was also worried about the workload of the head and how it might affect his family.

Ed also talked of capacities that heads needed to develop. One was the ability to balance responses to staff. Ed felt that he been guilty of 'making a rod for my own back' when he had helped staff with problems but not somehow managed to equip them to deal with the problems in future. Rather he saw them as wanting him to be permanently on hand to intervene. The head's workload was always larger than could be easily managed and Ed referred to the capacity to work long hours and persist with difficult issues. He spoke as if he had long accepted the isolated position occupied by the head. He found heads' meetings useful sources of advice on dealing with awkward and new situations. He had been able to build supportive relationships with senior staff and found that helpful. He also referred to the support of wife and family, speaking of having 'a strong hinterland'. Despite his experience he stressed the fact that certain things never seem to become easier. There were always adverse changes on the horizon and so much to do that he was never sure that he was going to continue 'keeping all the balls in the air'.

School context

Fiona was head of an LEA maintained (community) school serving a market town and surrounding villages. The school was the only one in the town, oversubscribed and competing comfortably with other schools in the area. It was twenty years old and had been built in phases. Much of its accommodation was relatively new and in good condition.

The socio-economic background of the intake was described by Ofsted as 'varied but slightly less advantageous than the county and country as a whole' while the range of attainment on entry was described as 'full' with 'a slightly higher proportion below the national average'. There were only nine statemented students and only 12% were registered as having any special needs. GCSE results, A level results and attendance were all above average. The active involvement of the parents was highlighted in the Ofsted. report. This case study head was the only one of the six to inherit a very positive performance base in the context of a thriving community committed to the school.

Fiona started her third headship here and brought a sense of personal security about her own judgements as well as a wealth of experience. She was interviewed just two terms after taking up her post (2000) and revisited a year later. She contrasted the school with her previous post where the circumstances had been a good deal more challenging. She referred to the usual situation faced by a new head where staff expect their problems to be solved for them. There were systems to be introduced and difficulties to be resolved. The main challenge, however, in contrast to the experience of the other case study heads, was the need to challenge those who were already performing well to aspire to do better. Insufficiently high expectations in

varying contexts could be seen as common to all. In Fiona's case, though, the community was already engaged and achieving. The change agenda had to be planned with care.

Strategies for change

During her first months in post, according to Fiona's account, she assessed the situation and tackled some immediate issues. She had to deal with some perceived deterioration in behaviour because the acting head had 'lost the confidence of the staff'. This was just a matter of putting systems in place and then insisting that staff use the systems, she recalled. At the time of the interview progress was being made although the systems were not as yet being fully utilised. Fiona's appraisal of the school led her to identify an element of complacency. She recognised that the results were good but felt that they could be better. Staff, governors and parents might, she said, be offended if this were put to them. Initially she saw herself as having to tread carefully because of this sense that the school was good enough as it was. Everyone accepted oversubscription as a part of life. While the local community was supportive, to Fiona there appeared also to be a lack of aspiration.

Fiona had to consider carefully the tactics she should choose to bring about change. One approach was to introduce governors and staff to a greater variety of performance data and the use of that data to monitor student progress over time. This method of establishing the level of performance at which to aim, which Fiona had used in her previous school, had eluded this institution, presumably, Fiona thought, because they seemed to do well without this analysis. Fiona was able to use the data to show that it would be possible to aim higher over time. She made it a priority to use the school development planning process to introduce the staff to structured lesson planning and the use of student performance data to maximise the levels each individual could reach. Her tactics were to influence the staff to expect more while also putting her own views, with evidence, to the key decision-makers in the shape of the

governing body and senior staff. She found it helpful that, apart from some of the behaviour management systems, the school had sound structures that she could employ to manage and influence people. She referred in particular to the presence of performance management mechanisms, especially as she had to process performance threshold applications when she did not know the staff well.

Staff

Two deputy heads were interviewed. One confirmed the nature of the work with staff on lesson planning and target setting. She talked about the practice of involving everyone so as to make the most of current good practice and tackle particular areas of weakness. The idea was to help everyone to improve, recognising that within the school there were variations in aspiration and achievement. She agreed with Fiona that the heads of year and department, the middle managers, were playing a critical role in this process.

The other deputy talked with enthusiasm of how different Fiona's leadership style was from that of her predecessor. He described how she delegated work to him with clear deadlines and then left him to achieve the outcome. She had made it clear that she understood that learning did entail making mistakes and this engendered a climate in which some errors were allowed. The senior management team meetings generated the framework within which people operated and Fiona monitored progress from time to time. Her predecessor, according to the deputy, had used meetings to do the work and this led to longer meetings and less delegation. He enjoyed the autonomy, he said, and felt he was learning new skills. He also talked of the way the meetings were times when they could contribute their ideas and be listened to. Fiona talked of creating this autonomous way of working by ensuring first that she had the team she wanted and that she could trust. They could 'see the grand design'. An inability to do the latter was, for Fiona, a potential barrier to progress at a number of levels. She had successfully

encouraged the senior staff she had inherited but that she did not feel were up to the job to secure other posts or retire. She had appointed people of her own choice from within the school or made external appointments.

Fiona referred to the whole staff as very motivated and committed. She had only a few concerns about individuals. The nature of the whole staff cultural change did not present some of the challenges described by other heads in the study.

Students

Fiona referred to a complacency that she detected in the student body. They were not aware of, she felt, or very interested in, the possibility of reaching higher levels of attainment. She sensed an insularity and a resistance to change. This was exemplified by their reaction to her decision to ban the egging and flouring and tie burning that had traditionally taken place at the school gates. Students were outraged, she reported. They did not see that a new head had any right to make this type of change. She received letters of protest from students and parents.

While students were enthusiastic supporters of extra curricular activities they seemed, according to Fiona, to accept and expect things to be laid on for them. She described them as a little 'spoilt'. She saw some spiteful behaviour that surprised her. She said that the students in her previous school had been nicer to each other with a few notable exceptions.

Parents

The contrast for Fiona with her previous school was the way in which parents actively sought involvement. At this school she was in the position of responding to parents' agendas rather than having to stimulate their enthusiasm. There were two challenges, however. She had to find a means to enlist the parents' support for an agenda of improvement and change when

she felt that they were in danger of interpreting such proposals as criticisms. She also had to help them to realise that the day to day running of the school was the responsibility of herself and the staff. There was, she said, too much interference in the work of the school. For example, parents started trying to reorganise music lessons or negotiate extra sessions in a modern foreign language. On the whole, however, the work with parents was very positive. Fiona was building on a tradition of involvement and there were only one or two parents who were said to behave in an aggressive or unpleasant manner.

Governors

Fiona described how she presented them with information about student performance data and tried to persuade them to think strategically about how to improve the school. She also endeavoured to encourage them to be what she termed 'more efficient' and plan the business to ensure that they were able to make decisions and actually have fewer meetings. At her first governors' meeting they had been reconsidering whether or not leotards should be permitted for physical education. They had apparently spent time on this matter. Fiona was asked for her view and made an immediate decision. Her view was that, while they were responsible for determining the school uniform, they should be approving a recommendation, not creating the recommendation.

The school occupied a prominent place in the town. This meant that Fiona and various governors were often invited to civic events. She 'enjoyed being a pillar of the community'. She was also aware of a potential danger. There was a close relationship between some governors, notably the chairman, and the local council (not the Local Education Authority). She observed that the loyalties were such that if there was a dispute between the school and the council, as she put it, 'he wouldn't support me'.

Performance

The school enjoyed positive indications of success. The challenge was maintenance and improvement. Ofsted described it as a 'very good school'. Examination results and attendance were above average. The budget was healthy, the school oversubscribed and providing good value for money. None of this changed between the interview and the revisit.

Preparation

As this was Fiona's third headship she displayed a considerable degree of confidence. She said that she felt she had been able to draw on her experience to deal with some staffing difficulties with aplomb. This view was confirmed by her deputy. She observed that 'nothing prepares you for headship' but also said of the chairman of governors and the possibility of a challenge 'it wouldn't worry me now' implying that it might have done at one time. Both the deputies talked of the ease with which she appraised and dealt with situations. Fiona did confess that she was taken aback by a clash with the teaching unions over an excluded student but felt able to draw on experience and overcome the feeling so as to regain the sureness of touch and clarity of purpose that she perceived as her strengths. This view was again confirmed by her deputies.

Fiona had found her first headship exceptionally testing and so had learnt survival skills and stamina. Her real leadership and management skills had been developed, she said, during her second headship. An effective head, according to Fiona, had to 'care about and believe in something'. In order to build strong teams the head had to 'like people'. In order to delegate properly the head needed to be personally secure and confident and to be able to retain the overview of everything that was being planned and implemented.

Fiona believed that efficiency was important and had learnt to run focussed meetings and not to waste time. She relied on keeping an up to date diary and on delegating as widely as possible and then monitoring progress and quality systematically, asking for periodic progress reports. She appeared to be well adjusted to the isolated nature of the post. She stressed the importance of creating a reliable team. She derived satisfaction from working with the team and pleasure from news of the school's successes and from participating in events like the school dinner and dance or the school fete. Although there was the normal head's workload, Fiona, as a result of the combination of her experience and the nature of the school, did not appear to be tackling a task that was as potentially daunting as that being contemplated by some of the other case study heads.

Introduction

The last chapter presented the data that were gathered from the interviews and other sources of information about the case study heads. This chapter is concerned with the answers to the research questions. There are four sections. Each section considers a separate answer. The questions are considered in this order:

What are the key features of headship?

What is success in headship and how is it measured?

How do heads perceive and respond to the expectations of their main audiences (staff, students, parents, governors)?

What can we learn about preparation for and support during headship?

What are the key features of headship?

In 'Headteachers at Work' (Hall *et al* 1986) the considerable variation between heads in the way in which they interpreted their role was attributed at least in part to the lack of a published job definition. While the 1986 legislation established a list of headteachers' duties, subsequent studies continued to portray variety in the practice of secondary headship. For example Grace (1995) reported on the difference between what he termed '*headteacher professionals*' and '*headteacher managers*'. The former were described as fearing that a stress on management activities would weaken their capacity to take a personal lead in improving teaching whereas the latter were depicted as convinced that effective management was the key to improving teacher professionalism. As an outcome of the literature survey in chapter one of this study, the very nature of headship was identified as an issue for exploration.

The question was specifically defined in the methodology chapter as 'What are the key features of headship?' with the intention that the comparisons between different perspectives on this issue would provide patterns of practice to illustrate the reality of headship. The question itself was not posed to heads or others as part of the research process so as to avoid the repetition of textbook explanations. Rather, evidence of the nature of the role was gathered from the interviews and other data. Underlying the analysis of the data in answer to this and each of the four research questions will be the overarching consideration as to whether headship is primarily made up of a kaleidoscope of tasks or is in practice a holistic activity.

A consideration of the data gathered led to three groups of findings in answer to this first research question:

- Matters that heads considered were requirements of the job;
- The responsibility for bringing about change; and
- Issues derived from the individual needs of the school.

Requirements of the Job

The first aspect concerning the requirements of the job was subdivided into three further categories: that which could be seen as *contractual*; that which was felt to be *externally imposed*; and that which had been *traditionally associated with headship*.

Contractual

The contractual elements that were alluded to by all the heads were: firstly, setting the direction of the school; and, secondly, managing people and resources. These activities resemble the references in the 1986 Act to aims and objectives and the management and organisation of the school.

Andrea described herself as being very explicit about her vision for the school. On her very first day she said that she attempted to raise people's sights in terms of pride in the school and referred to the way in which she saw the school moving forward in terms of performance and student recruitment. The Ofsted report, compiled three years later, referred to 'a clear sense of direction'. Senior staff referred to 'having a say' and being able to 'get a sense of the big picture'. They also referred to an insistence on Andrea's part that certain initiatives took priority.

Another head, Cathy, portrayed herself as making very clear from the very first day the overriding need to improve school performance through improving the school climate. Senior

staff stressed how much they had welcomed her clarity and decisiveness. This process of clarifying the vision was perceived by these heads as essential in order to fulfil the contractual requirement to set the direction of the school.

These two heads indicated that they set the direction for the school from a clearly held predetermined personal position. Senior staff were invited to follow and become involved in the lead set by these heads. Not all heads talked of themselves as setting the school's direction in this way. Brian, as he started his second headship, described how he assessed the needs of the school and created a senior management team that set the direction and priorities during discussions that he chaired. His stated intention was to rid the school of a 'secondary modern feeling'. The report of the inspection by Ofsted described how he planned to 'raise achievement'. The same report referred to his way of leading by example thus highlighting the way in which he went about setting the ultimate expectations. It then went on to include a reference to the way in which the members of the senior management team were responsible for the quality of leadership and teamwork within the school.

Fiona, embarking on her third headship, commented on the need to tread carefully in a school where governors and some staff saw the school direction as already established. She developed her own views about the direction required but had to plan how to introduce these to the relevant decision-makers.

A key feature of headship is, therefore, concerned with the vision or direction for the school, summarised by Mortimore and Mortimore (1991) as 'Defining the aims and objectives of the school' (p vii). These insights indicate the potential for variation in practice arising from this particular activity, including the way in which the head works with senior staff and the way in which he or she arrives at and communicates the vision or direction.

While the 1986 Act referred to the management and organisation of the school, the 1988 Act provided for the delegation of a range of managerial responsibilities, particularly responsibility for resources and people, directly to heads and governing bodies. In the initial interviews with the case study heads there were references to the way in which the school budgets were managed and how the heads dealt with the consequent threats and opportunities. There were two main themes. One concerned the recruitment of an appropriate complement of teaching staff, associated with heads' and governors' responsibility for ensuring that the school could afford to pay its staff. The other focused on the way heads and governors were charged with taking more responsibility for the condition of the school buildings.

Derek talked of how he was faced, on the first day of his headship, with a budget that did not balance and of the trauma of having to make staff redundant. Brian described how he used the imperative to reduce expenditure as a means of restructuring and strengthening his developing senior management team. Ed had inherited some buildings in need of modernisation and a need to accommodate more pupils on a restricted site. As head of a grant maintained school head he was able to initiate planning discussions with the Local Education Authority and the Funding Agency for Schools and bring several funding initiatives together. Whereas the nature and maintenance of school buildings and issues relating to the employment of staff and associated budget issues had not been key responsibilities for heads prior to 1988, resource management responsibilities were now significant (Wallace 1993) as these contributions from Ed and Derek illustrate.

Externally imposed

These requirements varied in kind and some of them are examined in more detail in the sections on success in headship and the expectations of constituent groups. However, it is important to recognise that the data indicated that heads saw at least part of their work as

constantly responding to external demands that kept changing. The 1993 Act made provision for the publication of secondary school examination performance in the form of league tables. The implications for schools became clearer during the course of the 1990s. The actual publication impacted on some schools in highly competitive areas. Andrea commented on the adverse impact of the combination of league tables and the concentration of grant maintained schools in the vicinity of her school. The Ofsted report comments on the unusually large numbers of students that attended the school that came from disadvantaged families. The deputy head with responsibility for community development observed that work with families was an essential part of the school's work in improving examination results. Derek alluded to the fact that the results attained by his school were the lowest in the town. He observed that this created an ongoing pressure for him, even though they were improving and even though the school did not feature in the lowest section of the national league table.

The interface between Ofsted reports and league tables meant that all heads had to demonstrate that the schools were achieving well in relation to the individual school's intake. Ed spoke of the amount of time he spent on analysing performance data in order to set expectations of subject departments. Ed had used data from the time he started at the school in 1989 and had seen the way in which the use of a whole range of data sources had become part of the head's role. In 1989 it had been his choice to draw on what was available. By 1999 all heads were expected to use National Foundation for Educational Research and Key Stage Test data to measure student and staff progress and success. This aspect of the head's work is further examined in other sections of this chapter.

In addition to the individual and group target setting that the government was expecting heads to oversee in relation to the business of raising standards, there was the rapid introduction of performance management and the threshold assessment process. Ed appeared to resent the way government ministers seemed to regard it as part of the head's job to find many extra

hours at a moment's notice. Fiona referred to the importance of systems and structures to support performance management, particularly when there is a change of head during a process such as threshold assessment. Meeting government expectations in relation to staff and student performance was seen as a key aspect of the head's work and additional to the outline job description for heads included in the 1986 Act.

Traditionally associated with headship

In addition to the significant contractual obligations defined by the 1986 and 1988 Acts and the additional requirements imposed by governments and local conditions, there is evidence from the data that heads also still attracted the traditional expectations that have always been associated with being a headteacher. For example, Fiona observed 'we have got a big classics concert in the local church, then Saturday night because it is the twentieth birthday of the school we have got dinner and dance and then Sunday there is the Summer Fete and the problem is the head has to come to everything'. Senior staff at Andrea's school referred to a whole range of community functions that either Andrea or they were expected to attend. Brian was conscious of the way in which local primary heads and local community leaders expect the secondary head to take a lead. In terms of the requirements of the job it is possible to see, even from this brief resume, the substantial nature of the head's brief.

Responsibility for bringing about change

The second major group of key features of headship concerns the head's responsibility for bringing about change. All the heads talked as if they accepted that bringing about change was part of their job and that their plans for improvement were evidence of this. The setting of the school's direction, a key feature of the head's job, now had to include, according to evidence from the case study heads, a sequence of changes that were shaped by the component parts of examination performance, school profile and intake and the efficient deployment of resources. As their starting point for this change work was their arrival at the school, it is not surprising that they spent time during the interview outlining their early days there, supporting the judgement in Weindling and Earley (1987), p66 that 'The arrival of a new head is a significant event in the life of a school'.

In terms of the literature survey in chapter one of this study, Weindling and Earley (1987) were the first researchers to highlight the change process as a significant part of a new head's job. They referred to a structure, outlined by Fullan, for analysing the change process which included planning and developing the change (initiation), implementation and incorporation, the latter meaning that the initiative is no longer seen as new but is part of the everyday working of the school (Fullan 1987). Several of the case study heads referred to the way in which they established what their priorities for change should be before introducing the actual changes. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to specify identification, initiation, implementation and incorporation as the structure for analysing and presenting the data on bringing about change. While these distinctions could be described as artificial they have been selected to provide a way of considering a complex topic. It is also worth noting the varying ways in which the case study heads set about bringing about change.

Identification

When each case study head talked of their first months in post they described a process of identifying the changes that they felt were absolutely essential. Andrea referred to the need to ensure the school's survival by introducing changes which were designed to lead to more rigour and stimulation in the classroom and an outward looking attitude among the staff. Ed and Cathy both alluded to the need to change the quality of the working relationships within the school in order to create a more positive working atmosphere. Cathy had identified how 'miserable' staff and students were and Ed wanted to move away from what he saw as an overbearing degree of formality between staff. Brian and Fiona, in very different contexts, identified the importance of creating a situation where staff would expect more of the students. Brian's talk of moving away from the 'secondary modern feeling' has already been mentioned. Fiona had inherited a school which Ofsted described as 'a very good school' but she saw attitudes as verging on complacency and was convinced that the school was able to produce higher levels of performance.

Initiation

Andrea outlined the process of initiating the changes. She rehearsed work with senior staff and others on developing a management structure that specified individual accountabilities to replace a rather casual arrangement, which she described as 'cricket' since there had appeared to her to be some connection between management responsibilities and membership of the staff cricket team. She said that at the same time she set out her stall to all the staff on a training day so that they could be in no doubt as to the future direction of the school. Cathy used a training day in the same way to initiate a planning process with staff and 'went overboard' to involve them all. Similarly, Ed set about a process described by Ofsted as leading to 'wider involvement by all staff' and 'an atmosphere of accountability and self

evaluation at all levels'. Both Cathy and Ed stressed the use of symbols to initiate a change process. In Cathy's case, the power bases of two of the deputies were a cause of staff unhappiness so she asked them to make coffee for all the staff on the training day. In Ed's case, he encouraged all staff to come into his office to show that they were not only permitted to enter but welcome.

Implementation

The case study heads also described how they led and monitored the process of implementation. All made clear that they could only undertake this with the support of and in partnership with their senior management teams. Andrea outlined a series of changes that had to be made within her team. Initially a deputy stated that he did not want to 'work with her' and was happy to be a Head of Humanities. This enabled her to recruit one new member from within the school who was committed to change. She then had to set some very specific targets for another senior teacher. Brian detailed how he concentrated on moulding his senior staff into a united team with overlapping job briefs 'so that you can't see the join' so that they could work in a concerted manner with the rest of the staff. Similarly, Ed's early priority with specific staff was to work on decision-making involving his senior managers.

Feedback from Ofsted and senior staff served sometimes to confirm the head's viewpoint but not always. In Brian's case, the Ofsted report made a particular point about the strength and contribution to change implementation made by the senior management team. The Ofsted report on Andrea's school made a specific reference to the clarity of her planning but did not mention the senior team at all. The deputy and senior teacher at Andrea's school expressed the view that they had understood what had to be done in order to ensure the survival of the school. This suggested an acceptance of Andrea's direction rather than the kind of dynamic

contribution to the leadership of the school that Ofsted were noting in the case of Brian's school.

In Derek's case, it was very clear that the school stood in need of a number of improvements. He took up his post just as an Ofsted inspection was due (he had been there just nine weeks when it took place). He recalled how he became submerged in assembling the data for the inspection and trying to rationalise the finances. He then talked of how he hoped that the Ofsted process would provide him with a clear set of priorities that would carry weight with staff. In the event he did not see the Ofsted report as providing sufficient clarity although the report does refer to some specific expectations of the 'new leadership'. He appeared to find himself thrown back on a natural tendency to want to move forward cautiously and to be able to feel that others were in agreement with him. Since those others were senior staff with whom he recorded experiencing difficulties, specifically in creating any kind of team ethos, Derek reported little real momentum for change. The deputy head talked of quite profound issues of rivalry among senior staff that she felt Derek should have tackled more resolutely.

A key feature of headship consisted not only of identifying, initiating and leading the implementation of changes; it also included dealing resolutely with the obstacles to change. These obstacles tended to be talked of in terms of the difficulties presented by people like Andrea's reluctant senior manager or Derek's fractious senior management team.

Incorporation

The head's role in monitoring the effectiveness of changes relates to the incorporation element in the change process. Cathy assessed her impact on the school as she was ready to move to another post. She was able to record improvements in performance and working practices as a result of better relationships but was also very much aware of setbacks in

certain departments within the school where all was not as she felt it should be. Andrea and her senior staff both agreed that the school was more outgoing and that expectations were higher although the examination results had yet to improve sufficiently. The difficulty of incorporating all changes was best illustrated by comments from Ed who was the longest serving head in the sample. He illustrated a cycle of continuous change, especially in the case of the middle managers. As a new head he had persuaded everyone to use external data to evaluate examination results. After eleven years in post he found himself persuading those middle managers, some of whom were the same people as were in post when he arrived, some of whom were new, to take responsibility for the actual results, what he termed 'turning may into will'.

Weindling and Earley (1987) suggested that making changes was a dominant activity for new heads but much less significant for established heads. Ed's interview and revisit provided a picture of perpetually overlapping cycles of change and his deputies took the view that there were always major change projects in hand. Brian's deputies presented a similar picture. The work to improve subject departments had been followed by the introduction of a year system. While dealing with the impact of this change they were then facing major issues in relation to the nature of the intake following changes in the primary schools.

The change process appeared to be ongoing and therefore managing change was a permanent key feature of headship. All the heads had to have strategies for dealing with change. They tended to deal with it differently. Cathy and Andrea were very clear about what was to be achieved and talked to the staff about what and how and then engaged everyone in the process. Brian and Ed developed their own perspectives but then worked on them with staff teams and developed the strategies with them. Fiona had to use a range of tactics to lead key groups like senior staff and governors to understand what could be accomplished without feeling that she was criticising the school's achievements. Approaches to working to change

the contribution made by parents and students also varied and are discussed under the third heading which relates to the differences between schools.

The individual needs of the school

While the national requirements are the same for everyone, each head works in a different way and there are many variations in the needs of the individual school. This is the third section of the presentation of the material answering the first research question about the key features of headship. The case study reports indicated that there were variations in experience between the heads and variations in context between the schools. The following paragraphs consider two aspects that emerged clearly from the data and have a bearing on the definition of the head's job.

The first is concerned with work with parents and students. It was clear that the challenges were different in different schools. Cathy, for example, worked in a school that was initially underachieving although the ability profile of the intake approximated to the national average. Her objective was to engage the students and parents through structured communication, awards evenings and the introduction of a new school uniform. Cathy tackled issues with less co-operative parents and students through making expectations very clear and then using fixed term exclusions for serious non-compliance. She then offered the parents the opportunity to come in and discuss what had occurred and, if they were prompt and supportive, she reduced the term of the exclusion. She reported that she persisted with this and it produced results. Cathy did confirm, however, that she felt that the parents were ready to respond. This was not necessarily the experience of either Derek or Andrea.

Derek alluded to families in difficulties whose social and economic circumstances prevented them from supporting the school or participating. He talked, during the revisit interview, of a

project supported by the Local Education Authority to help involve parents, and of the efforts made by staff and governors to encourage parents take part. The level of engagement was disappointing. Derek, in a moment of exasperation, referred to 'chaotic families'. Andrea sent out questionnaires, held curriculum evenings and day time consultations and described how she had managed to harness some parents but still faced hostility and resistance to some of the school's work to raise standards. She did affirm that she felt that they persuaded at least some students to a more positive way of thinking. This compared with the days when they said that they felt 'she's making the school too good for us' meaning that they thought that the school was becoming 'posh'. The senior teacher observed that, despite this acceptance, it was still hard work involving large numbers in extra curricular opportunities.

Fiona contrasted the way in which the parents of her new school were extremely supportive with the rather more mixed picture from her previous experience. She talked of how parents supported school events with enthusiasm and how this generated a high degree of student enthusiasm for extra curricular events. The aspect that required careful managing was the way in which these committed parents involved themselves in the detail of the school day, for example querying the timing of music lessons.

As the head who had served the longest time in the same post, Ed talked of defining and redefining expectations within the community as the school changed through rebuilding, expanding and improving performance. The esteem in which the school was held had to be sustained. This not only entailed stipulating what the staff had to contribute; it also led to more explicit demands of parents. Ed talked of having to arbitrate where this process brought the school and parents into conflict over day to day expectations of behaviour and homework. He also talked of the way in which he adapted his own perceptions of his role over time in parallel to with the school's development.

The second set of findings that relates to the needs of the school concerns the way in which the individual head managed to work in his/her particular situation. All the heads talked of the confidence that was required to tackle the specific problems. In different ways, which relate both to the individual head and to the school, ongoing confidence building emerges as a key feature of headship. Derek described how difficult he found the isolation of headship and how he really needed the input from colleagues to reassure him that decisions were correct. The deputy head both understood this and implied that it did not help Derek to take command of the team. Brian started his second headship with the confidence to know what was most important, observing that 'you have the comfort of knowing that there are certain things you can ignore'.

Cathy stressed her own confidence and clarity of thought, claims which were corroborated by senior staff and the Ofsted report. However, her confidence was shaken by a year of disappointing examination performance and later by some critical reactions on the part of some staff to the news of her departure for another post. Cathy confessed that she had, to some extent, undermined her own confidence by adopting a more directive management style which she judged was right for the school but did not suit her way of working. This discomfort was not evident to senior staff and may reflect a high degree of self criticism on Cathy's part.

Fiona was interviewed shortly after taking up her third headship. At first she seemed to have been taken aback by some early events, for example an awkward union matter which featured in the local press. However, at the point of the revisit, she seemed to have the sureness of touch and clarity of purpose characteristic of a confident and experienced leader. Certainly the deputy head talked of her confidence and of how he felt that her personal security allowed him to flourish. He contrasted this confidence to delegate and expect progress which would be monitored from time to time with what he described as a more time consuming and restrictive way of working under her predecessor who had checked everything frequently.

This section has been used in two ways: firstly, to highlight some important features of the head's role that emerged from the study; and secondly, to introduce some of the aspects to be developed later in the analysis in answer to other research questions. As this discussion has demonstrated, the head's role has emerged as extremely wide ranging. One reason for this is the pressure for endless continuous change and improvement which involves revisiting and re-examining many aspects of the work of the school. Another factor is the urgency of responding to externally set success measures in the context of the immediate local school needs.

The next section of this chapter explores what the data have to say about what heads see as success and how it is measured. This includes an examination of external indicators and heads' own aspirations and also allows for a closer study of the head's definition of success compared with the Ofsted report and other data sources. The subsequent section is concerned with the constituent groups and so includes more detail on building senior staff teams and work with students, parents and governors. The final section considers ways in which the head has to sustain him or herself and ways in which he or she should be prepared for and supported in headship.

What is success in headship and how is it measured?

The first section of this chapter was devoted to answering the question about the key features of headship. One identified expectation of heads was the need to respond to external factors. A characteristic of the 1988 Act and subsequent legislation was the specification of certain requirements of heads. These supplemented the stipulations detailed in the 1986 Act and included: financial management; the implementation of the national curriculum; and the work associated with responding to Ofsted inspections and arising from the publication of examination results. Over time governments have placed an increasing emphasis on assessing school performance, based on the use of ever more sophisticated data sets.

Heads' success was now measured at least in part against nationally determined performance indicators. These indicators applied to schools and therefore to heads, given their ultimate responsibility for everything to do with the school. The accountability of heads was regarded by many as if it were synonymous with that of the school. This applied to the evaluation of performance against examination results and to the judgements to be found in Ofsted reports. This position was further formalised by subsequent regulation concerning performance management although the latter was only introduced when this study was coming to an end. All the case study heads accepted this range of accountabilities, as did the heads interviewed by Ribbins and Marland (1994). In this sense they were accepting the externally defined measurements of their performance. The consequent implications varied from head to head.

The case study heads also talked of other, more locally determined, external expectations and of ways of judging their success in meeting those. A third group of expectations was personal to each head and reflected individual aspirations. It transpired that these two groups of indicators of success were more subjective than the performance measures and were

answering a question that would more accurately have been worded - What is success in headship and how is it identified?

Heads' success as measured by nationally determined performance indicators.

These included: examination results, especially the percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades; student attendance figures; school roll; and school budget. Judgements incorporated in Ofsted reports provide insights into the significance of these figures as do the individual head's own assessments of achievement.

Examination results

All six heads, when they described their early days in post, talked about improving examination results. The implication of being engaged in perpetual cycles of change was that a school's examination results would continue to improve exponentially. Andrea certainly did not deny the importance of ongoing improvement. For her, however, there was a particular frustration. While the quality of teaching, she suggested, was 'worth 30%' of students gaining five or more A* - C grades, the school consistently performed at a lower level and did not attain its performance targets. Andrea's evidence for what she described as 'ongoing improvement' in the quality of teaching was derived from the school's own monitoring system that included an elaborate system of lesson observation and quality control which was praised by Ofsted.

According to this Ofsted report, the school had an intake with a high proportion of students with special needs. The standards attained fell below national norms and there was a proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. When revisited two years after the inspection Andrea expressed pride in the improvement in the quality of teaching and frustration at the sluggish

progress with the raising of the headline examination performance indicator (the percentage of students gaining five or more A*-C grades). While she said that she felt that the students could do better and that this was the basis for the school's targets, her senior staff were not so wholeheartedly convinced, talking of the difficulty of working with 'so many children who have nothing provided for them at home.'

Fiona asserted that, in her situation, the headline figure was a good one to use to challenge any complacency. She needed a clear reason to introduce particular practices to the staff, in this case the use of student performance data and close monitoring of planning. These mechanisms had previously eluded a school whose performance was already deemed to be good. Fiona talked of her determination to make sure that the governors, for example, started to take data seriously. She welcomed her own change in context from a school where examination performance was among many things that needed to be improved to a school that that could attain greater heights given clear goals supported by evidence. Fiona also subscribed to the notion of ongoing improvement and used the examination based performance indicator as a management tool to bring about improvement.

Cathy declared that she had known that improved results would follow once other aspects were corrected. For her, the improvement in examination results was a sign that the other changes had been accomplished and that it was a significant aim but not the central purpose behind her work. As her deputy pointed out, Cathy saw her job as rebuilding the school steadily and solidly based on quality teaching in subject departments and support for individual student achievement. Performance indicators were grouped by Cathy who brought together examination performance, a healthy school roll and a balanced budget. For Cathy these were signs of a successful school and, by implication, an effective head. Ed also described a concept of organisational efficiency where the deployment of resources and accommodation was supportive of the educational processes that created the effective school.

These case study heads said that improving examination results constituted a sign of their success. The nature and fragility of that improvement agenda was in part dependent on local factors and this is illustrated later in this section. These heads also recognised a range of contributory success factors or indicators which they monitored as part of their ongoing assessment of their own success. They judged their own success with improving the quality of teaching and the school climate as part of the agenda to improve examination performance. There was also a sense, particularly from Cathy, that financial efficiency, effective student recruitment and high levels of student attendance all reflected a situation where changes had been brought about to put the school on a sound footing.

Budget

Ed described how a considerable amount of his energy in the early days of his headship was devoted to budget and building matters. He was particularly concerned with attracting capital investment to regenerate and increase the school's physical capacity, in order to take advantage of the opportunity to increase the school's roll as well as improve the quality of the educational experience through the enhancement of facilities. Cathy saw the successful management of the school's finances as absolutely essential and said that any head had to be able to ensure that this successful management was carried out sufficiently effortlessly to leave plenty of time to devote to the people issues. Derek talked of struggling with presenting the budget to Ofsted and the necessity of making staff redundant in order to balance the accounts. His concern was that the limited success of balancing the accounts produced a negative impact on the staff but that failure to resolve the finances would also lead to financial problems for the school. He was unable to perceive any positive outcomes from resolving this position. Andrea recognised a major challenge as soon as she examined the school's finances and implemented a selection of fund raising strategies including the acquisition of

sponsorship. For Andrea the Ofsted report's reference to the fact that the school was well resourced was a sign of success.

School roll

Attracting students was the way of making sure that the school had the finances to manage. All the case study heads referred to the need to continue to enhance the school's profile in the community. Derek was battling with the effects of a shrinking intake, in the local context of a generous supply of school places in the locality. Andrea talked of how she knew, when she took up her post, 'that one school would have to close and it wasn't going to be my school'. She worked to make the school more outward looking, attractive and successful and co-operated with the LEA's plans to bring about an amalgamation – eventually on the site of Andrea's school. The benefits of this amalgamation included a building programme and a rising school roll. Brian and Ed both talked of growth while Cathy depicted an increasing level of oversubscription as a sign of success. Fiona's staff and governors accepted the position of being oversubscribed as a fact of life. She attributed it to the school's good results, supportive community and the fact that there were no immediate competitors. Her concern was that as a result there was no real sense of challenge and aspiration within the school and wider community.

School attendance

The student attendance figures for each school were not only a matter for Ofsted judgement but were the subject of targets in individual school development plans where there was an issue to be tackled. Student attendance was an issue at the margins for Ed in that there was a small group of very poor attenders and the school was said by Ofsted to be working hard and

achieving partial success. Poor levels of attendance posed a serious problem for Andrea and Derek.

In Andrea's school there were annual targets but progress towards improving levels of student attendance was extremely slow. The Ofsted report referred both to deficiencies in the school's system for checking attendance, and to issues within the community relating to deprivation. Andrea pointed to the governors' report to parents that showed that there had been some progress with systems and with contacting parents quickly, but that attendance levels were still disappointing. Andrea and Derek both presented the school attendance figures as a symptom of problems within the social and economic framework of the local area.

Attendance at Fiona's school, on the other hand, was reported as above average and the only challenge was one of maintenance. The heads measured their own success in relation to the effectiveness of systems and structures for managing and improving student attendance as devised to meet the needs of that school.

The relevant Ofsted reports all commented, as they are required to do, on the school's performance in relation to value for money. This indicator relates the deployment of resources to the pupil outcomes. Despite the standards issues faced by Andrea, the school was described as giving satisfactory value for money. The Ofsted report for Ed's school also referred to 'sound ' value for money. Fiona's school, under the previous head, was said to give good value, whereas Derek's school, nine weeks into his headship, was said not to be giving satisfactory value for money.

This represents a kind of external summary judgement relative to the various national performance indicators. In talking of this type of judgement on their work the heads did not spend time challenging the validity of these indicators, although they all, in different ways, depending on their school's situation, commented on the largely context free way in which the

judgements tended to be constructed. It is possible to detect, even from this small sample, that the indicators tend to come together and feed off each other. For example, in the case of Fiona's school, the successful rating against a number of indicators could be attributed to community commitment which contributed to high levels of student attendance and wide ranging support for school events. Success breeds success and difficulties compound one another. Generally the case study heads' schools could be grouped as follows: favoured (Fiona); a mix of circumstances (Brian, Cathy, Ed); and in very difficult circumstances (Andrea and Derek). The Ofsted reports tended to follow this pattern. The interesting point to note is the judgement that Andrea's school, according to Ofsted, represented value for money, despite the school's examination performance. This could in part be explained by the clarity of planning also praised by the Ofsted team. Equally, judgements about funding may have taken into account the preparation for the amalgamation. The pattern from these six schools is that positive performance in one area leads to positive performance in another and that for some schools this position seems to be secure. For others there are degrees of fragility depending on circumstances and events. However, there is the possibility, as in Andrea's case, that practice can be developed that will depart from the trend. The nature and impact of the relevant factors leading to this departure from the trend, including local conditions, would be worth further consideration. A closer examination follows of some local expectations and conditions affecting the circumstances of these case study heads.

Local expectations and factors

This section reflects the data that is particular to the circumstances of the school and the head. The case study reports detail these circumstances. As already indicated Derek and Andrea faced the greatest challenges in terms of raising academic standards and engaging with the parent body and the local community. Brian, Ed and Cathy could record both considerable progress and setbacks in circumstances that provided scope for real progress but also called

for constant vigilance. Fiona's position was head of a school that she felt should aspire to achieve more. These variations created a variety of success agendas that, while they were not completely distinct from the drive to meet the nationally specified performance indicators, were individually defined by the heads in their own circumstances. This echoed the way that the heads interviewed by Mortimore and Mortimore (1991) spoke about their specific individual challenges.

Derek's interview was dominated by his sense of the expectation that he would 'radically reform the school', be a 'messiah'. He felt that this was an unrealistic expectation and that the only way to take the school forward was to involve all the staff in taking collective responsibility for instigating and implementing the changes that were needed in order to improve the school's position. His stated success criteria for himself were: effective team leadership by middle managers; staff taking responsibility for the quality of their lessons and the attainment of students; and pastoral care based on good relationships and clarity of expectation rather than continuous shouting. These would, in turn, he was sure, bring progress against the external performance indicators.

He described some modest progress in terms of persuading middle managers to use student data to set targets for students and involve their staff in the process, although he was not confident that all the middle managers were convinced. He also talked of making headway with senior staff in relation to pastoral care. He was clear, however, that progress was turning out to be too slow, both for staff and for the school. He realised, and this was confirmed by the deputy head, that he could have pushed the pace earlier. He also did not really manage to resolve some fundamental difficulties between senior managers and this did slow progress that was supposed to be based on a unified approach. The deputy head alluded to the fact that some good initiatives were embarked upon during Derek's time. She also stated that difficulties with some key staff and an apathetic parent body meant that they were not brought

to successful fruition before he moved on to another headship that he said he hoped would prove more rewarding.

As the longest serving head in the study, Ed was able to refer to success in terms of cycles of endeavour. When he first took up post, he recalled, he used the kind of student data then available to assess the quality of the school's examination performance. This enabled the senior management team to track and attempt to improve, for example, boys' achievement levels. It also allowed them to project forward performance trends. The advent of a whole range of individual student data sets coupled with performance management for teaching staff had led him, more recently, to insist on departmental and individual teacher targets and insist that staff 'really took responsibility' for things that had always been within their brief. His own success criteria were the outcomes of work described earlier: middle managers' acceptance of their responsibilities; departmental added value scores; reduced dependence by departments on intervention from senior staff and evidence of autonomous setting and attainment of standards.

Ed had talked of two cycles of change in the use of data, referring to them both in relation to outcomes for the school and in terms of the culture of the way the school worked. Some cycles of change that affected heads' capacity to secure success in the school were localised and not always helpful. For example, Brian and Ed both talked about changes in the ability profile in the catchment area and its schools which was likely to impact noticeably on an agenda for continuous improvement. Cathy referred to the way in which her work on improving the way in which staff related to each other had to be rendered more directive and hierarchical. She had no personal objection to being more directive and felt that it was probably particularly necessary in relation to those areas of the school that had not improved. However, her initial impetus for improvement had been based on the need to introduce

collaborative working to replace ineffective and, as she saw it, stultifying, hierarchical management.

While these cycles of local challenges and changes are, in their timing and nature, specific to the context, they are also likely to be experienced by many schools and heads over time.

Andrea had to deal with an amalgamation that had a number of effects and was a very particular local event. She was successful in her initial goal of ensuring the school's survival. The amalgamation with another local school presented additional opportunities and so she developed supplementary goals including a rapid and well managed transition, expansion of the school roll and extension of the buildings and renewal of some old facilities, all based on the opportunities provided by the amalgamation. Andrea also had to overcome some short term difficulties arising from the proposal to amalgamate. Some of the parents of students at the other school were very hostile and threatening. There were also teaching staff who had either to be given jobs in the amalgamated school or found other opportunities.

Andrea described how she set herself short term targets which amounted to winning over as many people as possible. It was clear from talking to senior staff that the amalgamation initially involved Andrea, the governors and the LEA. Senior staff took part in the implementation once matters had been resolved but not in some of the inevitable unpleasantness associated with the proposal. Andrea talked of feeling very alone at times in the early stages when threatened by parents from the closing school. The whole experience of planning the survival and expansion of the school was highly formative for Andrea. She described her early tactics in terms of attracting initiatives and projects to the school to strengthen its position in the eyes of local decision makers. The successful management of these projects meant, she felt, that the school was deemed to be both reasonably well resourced and giving good value.

The case study heads commented at length on both the externally determined performance indicators and the local challenges they faced. All the heads referred to the extremely taxing nature of the job and the difficulty of feeling successful at times. The third part of this section is concerned with some of their personal aspirations for success.

Personal success

All the case study heads recognised the fact that their success depended on other people.

Andrea set herself the goal of turning a senior teacher who had no experience of pro-active leadership into an effective senior manager. At first he appeared to make progress but as time went on it was clear that he was holding the team back. Andrea staged a showdown during a senior team training day. The eventual outcome was a more junior role on a protected salary.

Andrea expressed some satisfaction at achieving a resolution despite the salary cost. Another personal triumph was the management of the amalgamation, both in terms of the planning and consultation work with the Local Education Authority and the involvement of staff in the implementation in school.

Brian's early success was creating a team identity at senior level. He alluded to the personnel he inherited as good at their jobs but working separately. As a result of the introduction of new members to replace those who took the opportunity to retire combined with the creation of linked role descriptions Brian expressed pleasure in a team where 'everyone was working and planning together'.

The possession of the overview of the school's position appeared as both a privilege and a barrier for each individual head. He or she could see and understand the bigger picture.

Andrea saw it as a privilege, including the sense of how the national requirements, the local challenges and the day to day life of the school could fit together and bring success, despite the apparent fragmentation of the working routine at times. Derek talked of the national picture as a barrier to feeling successful because it seemed so far removed from his everyday working life. Fiona's deputy affirmed that her capacity to be clear about priorities because she was working with the big picture helped with the process of effective delegation. Fiona herself described how she also found satisfying the act of fitting together the school's facilities and extra curricular strengths with community enthusiasms ' I am enjoying the pillar of the community stuff'. She commented on the fact that the strengths in arts and community had produced a potential bid for specialist arts school status. Fiona's experience also illustrated the potential barrier that can exist between the head and other key staff if they cannot recognise or share to some extent in the 'grand design'. Fiona was able to indicate how, in quite a short time, she had been able to persuade senior staff who could not grasp the agenda to leave so that she could recruit replacements. She had the advantage of a 'reasonably good budget', whereas the finances at Derek's school were not healthy and therefore he had to work with existing staff to try to persuade them to see the whole school approach.

For all the heads, just keeping going was a sign of success at times and certainly all the heads alluded to the workload. Strategies for managing the load included delegating extensively and being realistic about personal strengths and weaknesses. The overriding concern that emerged was the very challenging nature of some of the people issues, such as having to tell people they were not performing. Cathy talked of how she found it very difficult to give completely honest feedback. Yet they all recognised that a sign of personal success was not just 'keeping all the balls in the air' as Ed put it. In order to sustain personal motivation each head

endeavoured to ensure his or her involvement in something he or she enjoyed, for example, work with students who were doing well or with staff with a particular forte.

Underlying many of the personal responses was a sense of the continual accumulation of layers of accountability. The range of national, local and school based expectations seemed to the heads to be in danger of expanding perpetually. Thus far this study has considered a variety of definitions of success. Meeting expectations is a sign of success and there were four significant groups of people whose expectations of heads had an impact on the heads' perception of the job and their own effectiveness.

How do heads perceive and respond to the expectations of their main audiences (staff, students, parents and governors)?

Introduction

According to MacBeath (1998) a tendency had developed, particularly in the UK, to make explicit many national and some local expectations of the secondary headteacher. An aspect that was not so explicit, according to MacBeath, was the nature of the day to day expectations of the head on the part of different groups. Equally unexplored was the way in which heads interpreted and responded to those expectations. MacBeath's view was that the interaction between the positions of the groups and the heads in aspirational terms made a critical contribution to the cultural development of the school. This section assesses how the case study heads perceived and responded to the expectations of staff, students, parents and governors.

Staff

The interviews and follow up work with the case study heads all tended to focus on teaching staff. Cathy referred to setting up a forum for non teaching staff and individual support staff such as bursars or site managers were mentioned by the other heads in passing. As there were no significant allusions to support staff, for the purposes of this study, therefore, staff refers to teaching staff. Discussion of the teaching staff can be subdivided into: senior staff; middle managers; and general staffing matters.

Senior Staff

The case study heads repeated the findings reported by Wallace and Hall (1994) in that they felt that they could not discharge all of the school leadership and management duties alone.

The case study heads expected their senior staff to share the creation and implementation of the vision and future direction for the school. Some senior staff shared that expectation, others talked of commenting on rather than shaping the vision, of understanding rather than setting the direction. The differences appeared to arise from the experience and aspirations of the senior staff and the individual head's decisions about the development of the team.

For example, Andrea indicated that once she had achieved the removal of the underperforming senior teacher (described in the section on success) she felt able to develop a senior team that was able to 'share the big picture'. This included shaping policy, planning and direction and from time to time seconding other managers to that process by extending the team membership for certain agenda items. She talked of this tactic, on the revisit following the first interview, as a strategy for involving more staff more consistently. When Andrea was first interviewed she had referred to how she felt that many aspects of the school's development and the thinking of many staff were heavily dependent on her. During the revisit interview she asserted that she felt that more staff were making a significant contribution as a result of the developments outlined.

Talking to a senior teacher and a deputy head from her school revealed a genuine appreciation of what they interpreted as the opportunity to understand and comment on the way the school was working. They were involved in the writing of and responsible for the implementation of aspects of the school development plan. Andrea had succeeded in sharing the load with these staff and utilising their ideas and so she appeared to have achieved a team identity that pleased her when she made the comparison with what she had inherited. The senior teacher,

however, confessed that he did not always understand the purpose of some of the discussions, particularly when the membership of the group was widened. There seemed to be a discrepancy between the strategic purpose of the team and the perceptions of one of its members.

Ed and Brian provided something of a contrast when they both discussed the way in which they recruited new senior staff and developed existing staff with an emphasis on the creation of a team that would lead the school. They expected them to share the strategic thinking and planning as well as the implementation and they worked to build teams that would set the whole tone for team working in the school. Brian's deputy heads concurred that their roles were strategic and that the team members' briefs were clear and interlinked to promote the teamwork. Their difficulties were pragmatic in that they did not seem to find enough time to develop their strategic perspective and they felt that it was hard to retain this perspective even in the senior management meetings. This was the result of the endless stream of day to day problems to be resolved - they both used the term 'firefighting'. Ed's senior staff also reflected some practical drawbacks arising from the very different - and sometimes inconsistent - ways in which they implemented the outcomes of the discussions. However, they did also confirm the dynamic nature of their own involvement in that they felt that they genuinely generated the decisions together.

In these three schools there was a real willingness on the part of the senior staff to work alongside the head despite the fact that this meant different things in each of the schools. In contrast, Derek depicted a team who did not get on and whose partners would not 'be in the same room together'. Derek tried to pull the team together socially and found the task impossible. He had to enlist the help of a Local Education Authority officer to try to resolve some performance issues so that he could at least rely on appropriate work in school. There was very little scope, as he said, for teamwork. While one or two members said privately to

Derek that they thought that they would make more progress if they did more work together they did not offer to help bring this about, did not attempt to heal any of the breaches.

In the case study schools, the process of developing the senior staff teams entailed making certain decisions. These included determining the extent to which inherited members who were not necessarily ideally suited to the work should be accommodated and the assessment of the pace and nature of changes that must be driven forward. The process of deciding between alternative courses of action, neither of which is validated by a set of ethical or regulatory guidelines, constitutes a dilemma. In fact it is often the case with a dilemma that neither course of action provides a proper solution and this is what makes taking the decision rather difficult. In some cases the case study heads faced dilemmas not dissimilar to those explored by Day *et al* (2000).

Day *et al* (2000) took the view that the role of the leader included resolving dilemmas and balancing contradictions. The dilemmas that were relevant here were: the balance between maintenance and development; between development and dismissal; and the choice between autocracy and autonomy. Maintenance referred to the act of keeping the school running without creating disturbance and pressure by making changes. Development represented transforming aspects of the school through enhancing the skills and capacities of the staff. Dismissal referred to the recognition that, despite the resulting pressures, action had to be taken because of the negative influence of a particular person. Autocracy entailed keeping a tight control on decision-making and implementation whereas autonomy implied some scope to act independently. Each of the positions, outlined from maintaining the status quo to introducing radical new developments, can be justified or criticised, depending on the circumstances. Heads were involved in making judgements accordingly.

Andrea's description of her experience indicated some success with enhancing the quality of the contribution of some staff at senior level and a recognition of failure in the particular case of one senior teacher. She had faced the dilemma in the first instance by deciding to give the senior teacher every chance to improve and to give time to that when it might have been easier just to let the situation continue. She faced the dilemma again when it became clear that the team was being adversely affected and that the development attempt was producing too much pressure. She then talked of how she opted for a form of maintenance rather than dismissal by finding him a role that 'played to his strengths' but was a more junior post.

Cathy could not contemplate dismissal for two very able deputies but commented that they operated too individually to be truly effective members of the team she was intending to build. Her solution was to work intensively to 'help them get headships which they deserved'. In the case of a senior teacher, on the other hand, she talked of opting for a process of developing him so that he could contribute a whole school perspective rather than continue in his student welfare role. He confirmed how much more involved he felt in all aspects of the work of the school and in the making of decisions. Ed's early years, he recalled, were devoted to maintaining and then developing senior staff he had inherited. Brian, on the other hand, was able to opt for a gentle form of dismissal through being able to offer generous redundancy packages.

The dilemma between autocracy and autonomy reflected a finding in the study of senior management teams by Wallace and Hall (1994). In this latter study it was asserted that heads needed to be sufficiently secure to trust members of the senior management team to carry major responsibilities on their behalf. The case study heads all referred to a recognition of the importance of this and to a desire to delegate substantially to senior staff. Delegation of major areas, including the responsibility for leading the decision-making in that area, required the awarding of a distinct degree of autonomy.

Some heads found it easier than others to allow senior staff to lead in this way. Brian's team structure formalised such an arrangement. He recognised that sometimes the staff did not then establish the right priorities but he took the view that there was no real development without learning through mistakes. Fiona, according to her deputy head, made very clear that she actually expected people to take things forward without referring back to her until the agreed reporting point. This represented a form of leadership autonomy within the school's leadership framework. Team members were given the freedom to act independently while being held accountable for outcomes. Cathy described a similar position in that the leadership team was working closely together in the meetings and the individuals were taking forward the decisions within the agreed framework. She talked, however, of how dependent she felt they were on her for ideas 'I am an ideas person, I always have loads'. Fiona's deputies, on the other hand, talked of the number of ideas they felt they had contributed.

Middle Managers

These two dilemmas also tended to characterise work with middle managers.

According to Grace (1995), a number of heads interpreted the introduction of the national curriculum as an opportunity to make heads of department much more responsible for what was taught. This type of responsibility for the quality of activity and the nature of the outcomes, rather than maintaining administrative processes, created both more autonomy over the management of the area and less freedom to choose priorities.

Ed spoke about the need to set targets for middle managers, both heads of department and heads of year. He talked of how they needed to accept responsibility for realising these targets and how they were then able to work with the staff on the tactics in their own way. The autonomy was set in the context of the overall goals of the school. Ed spoke of how the most effective heads of department were able to operate with considerable autonomy within this context. They worked with their staff, dealt with students, solved problems and delivered the results. Less effective middle managers disputed the targets and appeared unable to reach solutions with their teams, rather needing others to find the solutions. Ed gave the example of the way students were able to gain access to an unsupervised classroom because a member of staff had left the door unlocked. The head of department was reluctant to see that the fault lay at least in part with the member of staff - rather he wanted the head to deal with the students. The dilemma for the head was that the force of external accountability meant that certain requirements had to be specified. Within that context middle managers could be allowed control over the work of their departments (Grace 1995). The head had to balance the benefits of freedom to operate with the need to ensure outcomes.

Fiona and Ed both stressed the importance of the role of the middle manager to the success of the school. They both reflected on the hard decisions to be taken where there were concerns about performance. The critical judgement was whether to work for improvement in the belief that it would be forthcoming and risk making the situation worse or whether to decide that there might well be no scope for development. The implications of the second course of action included deciding where and if the member could be maintained in an appropriate post. Other implications included a recognition that all schools can only sustain so much development at one time and that the head has to balance development and maintenance according to available resources.

Fiona talked of tackling weak performance in an area where a number of students were affected and therefore, in the context of a whole school approach to improving lesson planning, the work would be cost effective. Cathy alluded to how she found it really difficult to tackle staff whose performance she saw as weak. Derek talked of having to work with the staff currently in post because of the way in which the budget problems reduced opportunities to recruit new staff. He was pleased with the progress made by some in taking responsibility for budgets and looking at student performance issues. He saw limited opportunities for development. Much of his work with staff was maintenance. He felt unable to consider dismissal. He described himself as naturally cautious and reluctant to embark on such a disruptive course of action.

General staff matters

The issue that concerned the heads in relation to the teaching staff as a body was determining the balance between consultation or involvement and accountability for achieving imposed results. This balance resembled the dilemma between autonomy and autocracy (Day *et al* 2000). Ed depicted a standard procedure which worked along the following lines: an issue was tabled at a staff meeting and a working group established that was chaired by a senior member of staff ; it had a mixed membership including managers and junior staff (and sometimes incorporating a governor); proposals were developed and discussed by staff discussion groups with cross departmental membership; and then plans were published in draft for final comment by individuals in writing and at team meetings and including submission to a governors' meeting if necessary.

Cathy indicated that she deliberately 'went overboard' in the creation of working groups during her first two years in order to create a climate of discussion. While these measures were described as initially well received, interest in being involved in everything tended to

wane over time. The heads all, in different ways, reported that their view was that staff wanted to be consulted over some things (they indicated that the specifics varied according to the priorities of the individuals) and told about others. Cathy's experience was of following the wide ranging programme of working parties with a more directive style and then finding herself dissatisfied with that approach even though she judged it to be the right option at that moment. This experience illustrated the way the heads felt themselves to be constrained by the pressure to guarantee results. Ed expressed some surprise at how little interest and input there had been from staff during the consultation within the school over performance management. He wondered of this exemplified the way the staff were also very aware of the pressure of external requirements.

As the examples of heads' expectations of staff indicate, the case study heads expected staff to perform as was appropriate to their position in the school. Senior staff were to contribute to school leadership, middle managers were to take responsibility for the performance of particular areas and all staff were to discharge their duties and both accept their accountabilities and be involved in some elements of decision-making. Heads faced many challenging situations in order to realise these expectations. This study contains a good deal of data that represented the head's perspective. The heads also reflected on some of what they saw, or assumed, were staff expectations of them.

Andrea talked of providing clarity of leadership and involving people but also being quite tough about what had to happen. Brian talked of having to resolve a contradiction between the existence of a staff forum to which senior staff were not invited and the fact that the issues raised needed senior staff involvement. His solution was to involve them in teamwork at every level. While the Ofsted report confirmed the successful involvement of a number of staff, Brian noticed that his changes had also destabilised some staff who found changes, even positive ones like improved departmental accommodation, hard to handle. The experiences of

Cathy and Ed in involving staff illustrated what they both saw as a realistic, if contradictory, perspective on staff involvement. Staff wanted to be involved and consulted but they also appeared to seek the security of being told on occasions and wanted heads and senior staff to take their workload into account when consulting them.

The senior staff who were interviewed reflected the way in which their perceptions were sometimes subtly different from the heads' views. They all appreciated being involved but their responses also illustrated differences of expectation, perception and experience. Derek's senior staff did not appear to expect a significant collective involvement whereas Brian's senior staff were disappointed when circumstances impacted adversely on their capacity to generate strategy together. Andrea's staff did not perceive that their involvement was as strategic as she felt it was whereas Fiona's deputy head valued more highly than she realised the degree of autonomy Fiona had introduced. Ed and Cathy both had senior staff teams that consisted of new appointments and established members. The established members revelled in the way that their working lives had changed as they found themselves involved in work with the new head and also talked of how much they had had to learn – the extent of their development. Ed had trained one such member to take over major financial responsibilities. The new members of Ed's team spoke of expecting opportunities for career progression and an acute awareness of the demands of headship. In Cathy's team there were two deputies – one who was new when she arrived and one who was appointed after the two experienced deputies had moved on to headships. Both were themselves applying for headships and the deputy who was interviewed described how they were managing their rivalry as Cathy's departure was planned (no acting head or successor had been appointed at this stage) and of the daunting experience of looking for a headship.

Students

The heads and their senior staff talked at length about issues relating to staff in comparison with the detail that emerged from the interviews and other sources about the expectations of the other groups. In many ways the move to on site management affected work with staff more than work with students. Many of the points that were made in relation to students reflected the fact that the heads saw students' needs as largely unchanged by legislative changes.

For example, the heads said that students wanted to be known and welcomed as individuals, to be cared for, to feel secure, enjoy the social side of school and be fairly treated. Cathy and Ed both believed strongly that for most students these considerations were paramount. Students, they said, did also look for opportunities to do some learning, enjoy decent facilities, be part of a system that worked and have their needs met. There was an implicit difference between concentrating on standards and meeting the students' wider concerns.

All the heads were preoccupied with what they saw as students' low expectations of themselves. These appeared to emanate from a range of sources. There was the normal conflict between priorities as described. Low self esteem both on the part of the individual student and at home was a factor for both Andrea and Derek. Brian and Ed referred to the diversity - and therefore inconsistency - of expectations within their student populations. Fiona hinted at complacency among students in that they were content with their levels of attainment. None of the heads found these factors easy to challenge and two heads - Andrea and Fiona - recounted anecdotes to show how very resistant to change the student body can be. Andrea referred to how she introduced plants to improve the environment but at first these were covered in Tippex until the students accepted this improvement. Fiona vetoed what she

saw as an inappropriate year eleven rite of passage involving eggs, flour and burnt ties and was surprised by the strength of feeling against this move.

Some specific student expectations were outlined by heads. Derek and Cathy mentioned student anxieties about bullying and their work as a head to allay these fears. Derek referred to a common room he had established which was decorated by students so that they could see it as their safe place and take a pride in it. Cathy made clear that part of her work on ethos and climate had entailed approaches and policies to counter bullying and that an open climate would, she hoped, ensure effective work to deal with bullying. From other heads a particular point was made about students' unrealistic expectations. Ed talked about some of the kinds of social events that could not be permitted, for example sixth form parties where alcohol was served to those who were over eighteen. Fiona referred to students' expectations that things could stay the same, for example the continuation of the egg and flour ritual, and the students' view that a new head had no right to make changes.

All the heads wanted to raise student expectations of themselves while also recognising the legitimacy of the students' wider expectations. While the gap between the students' own expectations and the school's expectations was wider in some schools, there was a gap in every case. All the heads wanted to boost students' expectations of themselves in terms of achievement as well as working on staff accountability for achieving more. One strategy was to involve students so that they might see the school as a place where they could have a say in what went on. Andrea invested personally in the establishment of a strong student council with a budget to spend on facilities and events. This type of strategy had to include work with parents as well.

Parents

All the heads were working from the position that parents would want to be involved in their children's education, that they would want to hold the school to account for the standards achieved and would welcome the opportunity to participate in school events, ask questions and help their children. This viewpoint was encouraged by some of the provisions of the 1988 Act in terms of parental choice and reporting to parents. It was also the way heads approached their own children's education and it was the message from local and national parents' groups. In practice, the picture was rather variable.

Fiona encountered a large number of parents who actively sought involvement in the school. She described this as a positive contrast with her previous headship where it was much more difficult to elicit this kind of support. Fiona linked the parental support for the work of the school with its success in terms of examinations and extra curricular work and its local popularity. She did not feel that she had to create this involvement and enthusiasm, rather she had to respond to parents' particular agendas and requests. For her the twin challenges were persuading the parents that results could and should be improved and, for some, making clear that she and the staff made the day to day decisions about running the school, after listening and considering viewpoints.

Cathy identified that there was potentially a considerable amount of parental support within the area served by the school. She described herself as already attuned to their key concerns which included behaviour, responses from staff and standards of uniform. She talked of how she spearheaded a programme that included introducing a more distinctive uniform, setting out measures to improve student conduct and a requirement that staff contact parents within twenty four hours. The work on improving teaching and learning incorporated homework expectations and as part of the work on the positive climate there was an increase in the

number of rewards evenings. While the Ofsted report confirmed the progress made in engaging the active support of parents, Cathy reported that this engagement did not apply to all parents and that, for many, homework was still causing some problems and that generally, there was still a need for greater consistency in approach from the school. For Cathy the work with parents had achieved a level of positive participation but there was evidence still of resistance on the part of some parents and still some reluctance to be fully open to parents from some staff in the school.

Andrea's initial efforts to open up the school to the parents were reported as singularly unsuccessful. Derek experienced the same resounding lack of response. Neither school had constructed, in recent history, an open relationship with parents whereas both Cathy and Fiona were either building on what had been there in the past or inherited a tradition of involvement. In addition, the nature of the intake at both Andrea's and Derek's schools indicated communities of people who might lack the confidence to become involved or have other pressing priorities. These schools were also the ones with the most significant standards issues and the ones where progress was hard won. Andrea talked of making progress over time with involving parents. She talked of finding herself investing time with small groups of parents and gradually building up their confidence and networks. The need to help parents to make education a higher priority was recognised by the LEA in each case through the establishment of a special project that involved parents and year ten students in looking at study support.

Most of the heads talked specifically about the challenge of dealing with what were termed 'difficult parents'. The term was mostly used to describe the more aggressive type of parent who does not appear to value the school or set any real store by their children's education. All of the heads evinced the view that there had been an increase in the number of violent and antagonistic parents coming into school. This was a view generally supported by the senior

staff, although it is fair to say that, while they had not escaped this phenomenon, it was not a major concern for staff at Fiona's school.

This is a perception that raises a question about successful handling of complainants. Brian and his deputies referred to a growing minority of situations that could only be kept under control since there were no ready solutions that would satisfy all parties. This tended to arise where the parents were unwilling to accept the school's stipulations in terms of work and attitude. Equally, however, in this type of case, the management of the school could not guarantee sufficiently skilful and consistent staff handling of situations – in one case in the modern languages department - to avoid giving the parents some cause to complain. Ed also alluded to the balancing of staff and parent viewpoints without alienating either. Cathy referred to an increase in the number of students who resisted their supportive and corrective interventions and were openly defiant. Brian and Ed attributed these problems to changes in the nature of the catchment area, or an increase in mobility in some sectors of the population resulting in greater difficulties in feeder schools. They did not feel content with containing the situation and would have seen success as persuading the parents to be more co-operative and only having, therefore, to deal with a modest number of problems at any one time.

Governors

There was an element of self selection in my group of heads in that they were all prepared to be open about their work and talked of being conscious of their accountabilities. There is a similarity about how they talk about their approach to governors in that, since the relationship with governors is contractual, if there had been any significant difficulties they would not have participated in the study. While senior staff were able to provide another perspective on the head's practice in school, they had very little to say about the governors. In order to

explore fully the mutual expectations of head and governors, a governor's viewpoint would have been required and that was outside the scope of this study.

This section of the chapter does little more than hint at some of the potential tensions that emerged from the study and some of the ways of working with governors developed by the case study heads. The heads recognised their accountability to the governing body as part of the context of school autonomy. They showed that they were aware of the need to bear that in mind in the way that they related to the governing body. A more profound exploration of this relationship would have required a different choice of subjects, the involvement of governors and a different focus in the literature survey.

Derek described himself as feeling secure and comfortable with his governing body as he considered that he was acting in the way he had said he would at interview. He stressed that they had appointed him and that they told him that they had confidence in him. He felt that they supported him fully in the way in which he had chosen to try to meet the challenges. They also supported, in a way that he described as 'sporting', his application for another headship.

The other heads all referred in different ways to deliberately influencing the way the governors operated. Ed referred to his view that governors should be informed and alerted to issues as early as possible. In return they should appreciate the complexity of some of the work and not indulge in superficial judgements. He contrasted the volume of information that he made available to the governing body with the practice of his predecessor. Brian was in a similar position. He talked of a governing body that was very tentative because of lack of knowledge and how he sought to build their confidence by involving them in many discussions of issues that could alternatively just have been noted. He spoke ruefully about

how this backfired when he raised the matter of how to spend an unexpected few hundred pounds of extra income and how the debate lasted for hours.

Brian's other problem with his governors had initially been a chair of governors who was too involved with day to day matters - trying to influence decisions about student organisation, for example. Brian's deputies both talked of Brian's excellent interpersonal skills but he described how he had to have a row with the chair before he stood down (after many years of service) and allowed someone new to become involved. Brian was full of praise for the succeeding chair and regretted her departure saying that someone else would have to be 'trained'.

Other heads talked of how they undertook the equivalent of training governors. Andrea mentioned how she helped the governors to work out their function and guided them in their expectations of her and their operational model in terms of committee structure. She referred to keeping a close eye on their work even when she had secured the participation of senior staff. Cathy spoke of establishing what the governors' expectations of her should be and then encouraging them to monitor her work and that of the school. She saw them as supportive, she said. She alluded to the fact that she had encouraged them to expect certain progress to be made within the school and that she had reported to them both the successes and the failures. She also said that she had encouraged them to delegate as much as possible to committees. Fiona introduced new types of performance data in order to try to influence the governors' thinking about the school and also talked of trying to persuade them to have fewer meetings and to be more efficient.

These case study heads all regarded their governors as expecting them to take the lead and to be prepared to be accountable. They all talked of working to ensure good relations with governors. There were occasional concerns. Fiona depicted a close overlap between the governing body and the local district council (not the LEA) and could foresee that if there was

a conflict the governing body might not support her. Ed expressed the wish that his governing body would sometimes take their responsibilities more seriously. He wanted them to understand performance data fully and not just select a few figures and come to superficial conclusions since this could lead them to make inappropriate judgements about the school's performance.

The relationships between the case study heads and their governing bodies did not appear in any instance to be as fully established as the relationships between the heads and members of the other three groups. Two obvious differences spring to mind. Heads work with staff and students every day and with some parents on a regular basis whereas the work with governors is primarily undertaken at periodic meetings. The relationship with staff, students and parents is with individuals as members of a group or body of people brought together because they have similar interests. The head is actually accountable first of all to the governing body as a whole and the legal responsibilities of the governors are vested in the governors collectively rather than individually (Creese 1993). There seemed to be little sense from the heads about the collective aspirations of the governing body and therefore there arose a desire to provide some sort of substitute through 'training' the governors.

Conclusion

This section has been about the insights into heads' expectations of key groups and perception of their expectations of heads that have emerged from this study. The pages devoted to staff issues illustrated the importance to heads of work with staff, the complex nature of some of the challenges they faced and the relationship between, for example, work with senior managers and the development of the school's culture (MacBeath 1998). The data on students and parents represented the impact of the school's social setting. In relation to governors, the

nature of this study did not allow for a detailed exploration but some potential tensions were revealed.

Some of the data and examples used in this section of the chapter are repeated in other sections. This is unavoidable since, for example, responding to parents and students is bound to be a key feature of headship as well as part of a study of the key audiences for the head's work. Equally, managing staff accountability is closely linked to success factors. Balancing the demands, needs and expectations of staff, students, parents and governors placed significant pressures on the heads. Their views on sustaining these pressures are considered in the final section.

What can we learn about preparation for and support during headship?

Introduction

This report was designed to highlight what was learnt from the study about preparing for and supporting headship, in the light of some of the issues that emerged from the answers to the other research questions. These issues included the substantial nature of the external requirements of heads, the need to lead a continuous change process, the challenge of managing a series of dilemmas, especially in relation to significant people management demands, and the impact of local circumstances on the individual head. However, when reflecting on how they came to be able to discharge such a demanding role and how they developed their capacity to do the job, the heads talked principally of the capabilities that they felt were essential to enable them to perform. They also presented themselves as largely self-sustaining and were not able to identify many ways in which others supported them.

When asked about preparation, therefore, the heads tended to talk about qualities and skills that s/he perceived were essential to headship, appearing to interpret preparation as the process of becoming equipped to do the job. In each case the head talked about his or her own experience prior to headship and the ways in which he or she felt prepared for headship by this experience. Each was prepared to give an opinion on the (then) recently introduced headship qualification (National Professional Qualification for Headship). They also talked about what it was that sustained them over time as they tackled the issues. The heads' responses are divided into three categories for the purpose of answering the question about preparation and support for headship:

- Preparation for headship;
- Essential qualities; and
- Sustaining headship.

Preparation for headship

This account incorporates both descriptions of the actual preparation the individual heads had undergone before their appointment and their observations on what they perceived as appropriate preparation.

Experience

All the heads stressed the importance of experience, suggesting that the best way to learn headship was to deputise for a head, implying that the quality of experience gained as a deputy head was viewed as critical. Ed talked about the importance of involving deputies in the full range of activities to prepare them for headship and even about the possibility of creating what he called 'on the job training', meaning a special opportunity for a deputy to act as a head and oversee a particular project. Brian talked about learning from experience and from working with other senior people. Cathy referred to the value of observing others in action and Andrea valued the lessons she had learnt while in post.

While these heads talked of their previous experience as relevant and helpful, some heads also said that they felt that they would have benefited from more directly relevant experience before taking up their posts. Derek talked of the need for greater breadth. His deputy headship had had a pastoral focus and he had 'kept in touch with the curriculum'. When it came to dealing with difficult senior staff and reluctant middle managers, Derek thought that he would have been more certain of his ground with a broader experience of all the aspects of running a

school. Another area that heads spoke of as one which they found difficult and would have liked to have had more experience of was dealing with difficult people and conveying difficult messages, for example tackling serious underperformance. Cathy said that she thought that these were still the 'most challenging aspects' of her headship and that the more that could be learnt beforehand the better. Cathy's deputy spoke of the way in which he felt that he could be a good head as a result of the combination of studying for the NPQH and being involved closely with Cathy in the work with staff and governors at all levels.

Fiona's perspective was that, on the one hand, 'nothing prepares you for headship' and that, on the other hand, her experience in two headships had enabled her to cope with, she felt, reasonable aplomb, with some difficult circumstances with staff during her first year. The deputy head confirmed this perception that she had managed the situations with an appearance of ease. He also referred to the way in which he had learnt from both his own successes and failures by being given full responsibility for monitoring and analysing performance within a group of subject departments.

Formal qualifications

When asked about the formal NPQH qualification, Ed and Cathy had heard 'mixed reports' from deputies who had attended sessions. Brian articulated the view that a theoretical perspective (referring to the model in place then) does help with making sense of personal and practical experience while Andrea saw theory as useful but not essential, 'not the be all and end all'. Cathy emphasised her position that the people skills were more important than learning about 'organising training or doing the budget'. Ed stressed the viewpoint that a wide range of experience helped the head to deal with a wide range of challenges. Fiona referred to the particularly testing nature of her first headship and how many skills she had developed during her second headship. The heads were expressing the view that the capacity to develop

a large number of skills and qualities accompanied by a broad experience of the relevant areas of work were essential. A qualification could help with some of the development and provide a structure for learning, as was illustrated by the experience cited by Cathy's deputy, but it was a complement to experience.

Other deputies who were interviewed also talked of having done the NPQH and of the fact that it had some value in giving them insights into specific areas, but they also felt that they would need to rely on actual experience. For example, Ed's deputy expressed concern at the possibility of finding that once he became a head he might still not be able to handle finance unless he 'had it as part of his brief' at some stage. He did not see the theoretically based NPQH (since revised) as providing the solution. Rather it was another hurdle to be overcome.

Essential Qualities

People Management

A key feature of headship that was evident from the interviews and the individual school Ofsted reports was the management of a continuous process of change. Engaging and persuading others was vital to this process as was illustrated by the case study heads. For example, Andrea talked, during the revisit interview, of how she had learnt a lot about influencing people and that it was vital to be able to articulate the vision 'chunk it down' as she put it, also saying that headship was 'a hearts and minds business'. She portrayed the head as primarily a 'motivator'. Fiona supported this view when she talked of how important it was for the head to 'care about and believe in something' which was then communicated to staff. Brian referred to how the head had to motivate him or herself first in order to motivate others.

Linked to the ongoing introduction and implementation of change was the way in which all the heads stressed how dependent they were on the teams of staff within the school to ensure that the external and other requirements were met. Fiona's view was that, in order to build effective teams, first of all heads needed to 'like people'. This perspective was reinforced by Derek when he mentioned the need for a head to show 'generosity of nature'. Brian made clear that an essential quality for headship was the capacity to form good relationships with a wide range of people.

They especially talked of their senior teams, recognising how dependent they were on their effectiveness. Heads needed, therefore, to recognise people's strengths and potential, to involve them in planning and enable them to work together on implementation. Cathy and Brian described a process of working with existing staff and identifying the changes that would be required in order to develop real teamwork. Ed's deputy head talked about how involved he was in the planning but observed that the sharing of consistent implementation was something that still had to be developed.

It was evident from a number of heads' observations and from talking to senior staff that the people management work generated dilemmas for heads to resolve. For example, a balance had to be maintained between listening to, involving, supporting individuals and insisting that the school's priorities could not be negotiated and therefore that individuals had to take their full share of responsibility. Brian emphasised how much time he had spent with some heads of department who had difficulty comprehending the link between the quality of the curriculum and the student response. Ed alluded to 'making a rod for his own back' when he helped certain staff with difficult situations and then found that rather than learning from the experience they wanted him to intervene every time. Cathy's deputy head appeared to understand thoroughly this dilemma when he described how the process of building a good school involved creating teams of teachers who understood what they had to do. His point

was that Cathy had worked with everyone and that some teams were now really strong.

Others, however, were still not focussed and effective and he felt that Cathy was quite right to direct them firmly as to what was needed even though she would rather work co-operatively.

An essential quality, therefore, is the ability to make sound judgements under these more complex circumstances. An example was the consideration of the extent to which the strengths that an individual brings should be allowed to outweigh evident weaknesses. All the heads had inherited staff and in particular senior staff. Cathy rapidly identified the fact that two of her staff would have to move on and worked to a plan to enable them to do so. She worked simultaneously to construct the basis of a new team by encouraging the staff she knew would stay. Andrea endeavoured to help a senior member to improve and had to recognise that this was not working. Derek tried to overcome considerable interpersonal animosities in order to build a team, but with little success. The difficulty for the head was that there were no clear guidelines about how radical a head should be at a given moment. Ed's experience contrasted with that of Andrea and Derek in that he was able to talk of senior staff he had inherited who had responded magnificently to the challenge. The individual head needed to exercise judgement in order to decide between the short term impact of moving the person out of the post or the school and the longer term damage if they did not improve.

An overriding consideration for Cathy in making these ongoing judgements was that the school had to be kept going and moving forward through 'good and bad times'. She referred to keeping things under constant review and accepting that in retrospect not all judgements will have been correct. Brian talked of the politics of day to day working with the staff. He meant the way in which, for example, meetings and discussions or temporary promotions could be used informally as ways of tackling problems as well as the more formal tabling of solutions. He also talked of his personal tactics. Like Fiona, he held to strong personal principles which were recognised by his deputies, but he also alluded to the value of being 'a

bit of a chameleon' on certain occasions so as to establish a rapport with a group or an individual with a view to exerting some influence.

These people related skills emerged from the study as essential. They could be developed through experience and were certainly strengthened through experience. When heads were appointed they needed to possess or be able to develop these qualities. The strengthening needed to be part of the support process. The heads in the case study said that they were largely responsible, through their own capacity to reflect on their own performance, for this learning.

The other group of essential qualities related to keeping up with the huge workload. Heads referred to both the breadth of the job and the level of external accountability. Andrea made the point that she had been prepared for dealing with the wide range of people and technical issues through her experience as both a deputy and an LEA employee. Sustaining the two roles simultaneously, she said, had taught her to manage a huge workload and a quantity of pressure. Derek talked about how he felt he needed guidance about what was most pressing because it was impossible to do everything. Ed also mentioned the perpetual pressure to prioritise and re-prioritise. He observed that the job of the head was not precisely described and that this made it difficult at times to see what was actually really necessary. However, even when he had decided what was important, priorities changed. His particular example was the need to spend much more time recruiting staff than he had planned. Ed felt that it was possible to do the most significant things eventually but only by persisting and working very long hours.

The ultimately solitary nature of the head's responsibility for all matters relating to the school created another pressure to exacerbate the impact of a heavy workload. Cathy admitted to moments of anxiety about the school: 'What if something happens to a child?'. She also recalled how she developed shingles before the Ofsted inspection which she said told her that she was not as robust as she thought. She outlined her routine of working flat out during the week and switching off totally at the weekends. She stressed the importance of proactive planning and time management, efficient use of time, good diary keeping. Andrea described how she made the most of her time in school and, particularly if she stayed late to work and participate in a meeting, she listened to music both at school and in the car driving home, to help her relax.

All the heads referred to efficiency in different ways. Fiona talked of relying on an up to date diary and effective delegation. Her deputy observed that she was good at delegating because she allocated an area of work and allowed people to take the work forward. She would monitor by asking for an update from time to time. Brian's view was that it was possible to plan, delegate and monitor if the head had the capacity to analyse and focus rapidly on the most important issues. It was essential, he suggested, for a head to read situations quickly so as to keep abreast of everything. The capacity to concentrate as fully as possible also contributed to retaining a grasp of progress with all major priorities. Certain intellectual qualities of this type, according to Brian, helped the head to delegate to good effect and manage the considerable workload.

Sustaining Headship

The case study heads presented themselves as people of independence who understood that headship set them apart from the rest of the staff. Andrea and Cathy said that their approach to headship was based on understanding the potential isolation of the position that says 'the buck stops here'. Derek had been used, as a deputy to being a member of a warm and supportive team and found it hard to adjust to the 'set apart' quality of the role. Brian, Fiona and Ed all talked as if they had accepted this aspect of headship some time ago. They all endeavoured to sustain themselves by various means. Brian, for example, set himself termly targets so as to be able to focus his own work and measure progress. He also alluded, as part of his own work planning, to the way he liked to anticipate and plan tactically in order to deal with particular people and situations. He found it helpful to know that there was a clear direction ahead even if, as in the case of his deputies, some staff found it difficult to keep it in view all the time.

Cathy said that she found it reassuring to talk to staff whose judgement she trusted. This included senior managers and others. For example, she sounded out the head of sixth about perceptions of standards of school uniform. Ed found heads' meeting useful because he could ascertain how colleagues were dealing with awkward issues and share concerns about matters like the difficulty of meeting the deadlines for assessing the applications from teachers to cross the performance threshold. Derek sought support from an officer of the Local Education Authority. Andrea stated that she found that regular dialogue with the Chair of Governors was very constructive.

All took delight and comfort from successes in whatever context. There was a correlation, in these six cases, between the head's personal morale and the range of school successes cited. Brian was concerned about difficulties caused by the new year system which were tending to

eclipse successes while Fiona was able to delight every day in news of and achievement in sport or the arts. These ongoing successes had a significant impact on the heads' feeling that the job was worthwhile. The year on year examination results and other aspects of the school's overall progress impacted on the head's analysis of how well the school was performing and how well s/he was succeeding.

A key feature of headship was described as the exercise of building up and maintaining self confidence. Confidence was seen as vital to sustaining headship. Cathy spoke strongly about the head's need to have absolute faith in his or her vision, philosophy and beliefs. A head should communicate with certainty, she suggested, a message about what constitutes a good school. This, according to Cathy, would convey conviction and charisma -the later being defined by her as personal certainty. She also talked of the importance of what she termed 'almost pigheaded confidence' when it came to exercising judgement. Fiona used the words 'it wouldn't worry me now' in connection with a challenge from governors, implying that confidence and security increased with experience. Andrea's confidence came, she stated, from her experience of the dual LEA and deputy head role and from her single- minded determination to be different from her predecessor. Derek inferred that he had been taken aback by the staff expectations of him and that his confidence had been shaken. He said that he felt that he had learnt that a head needs an exceptional amount of confidence, calling it 'arrogance'.

Cathy stressed the need for heads to feel secure personally. Cathy's own independence and resilience arose partly from her personality and her excellent relationships with many of her staff and the nature of her experience. She also mentioned a very supportive and encouraging husband who appreciated and applauded her need to seek challenges and variety and move on from time to time.

Ed actually described the importance of a 'strong hinterland' a personal life that helped with coping with headship. A pressure for some heads is the tension between family and working hours. Ed's wife was a senior member of staff in another school so there was some element of working in parallel. Derek, however, recalled being asked by his son 'are we going to see you this week?'. Ed's deputy was concerned about the impact of his work on his own family if he became a head.

The capacity to build and sustain physical and emotional stamina was referred to as vital for survival. Brian talked of needing to 'perpetually recharge the batteries'. Andrea referred to the way she perceived that she had to remain cheerful all the time or the staff became worried. Even when experiencing an Ofsted inspection – described by all as the ultimate survival test – the heads said that they needed to be robust so that they did not lose heart or sight of ultimate goals.

Conclusion

At the heart of the heads' responses to the question about preparation and support for headship was the view that the possession of certain qualities was vital in order to sustain headship successfully. The intellectual qualities included the ability to analyse situations rapidly, grasp what needed to be remedied and form potential solutions. This capacity had to be supported by a process of continual reflection which informed the evaluation of personal effectiveness and the ongoing adjustment of priorities. A study of managerial capabilities in education (Cave and Wilkinson 1992) identified 'higher order capacities' which included reading the situation, exercising balanced judgement, using intuition appropriately and displaying political acumen. This study nominated three areas of managerial capability: knowledge relevant to the responsibilities of the post; skills which could be developed and practised; and the higher order capacities. The knowledge and skills could be acquired and

honed through experience and training. The higher order capacities could be refined through experience but were described as generic cognitive abilities which the manager would need to possess.

The heads in this study were of the view that experience had provided both the chance to gain skills and knowledge and to test potential for headship. They saw formal training as a potentially helpful addition. The nature of the role meant that it was essential for the head to combine the possession of people skills and intellectual abilities with the capacity to manage a huge workload and an emotionally and physically draining job.

In addition, this had to be done in the context of professional isolation. The heads recognised the way in which they, like other people in very senior positions, were set apart from others in their organisations, by the nature of their responsibilities. Like the heads in the study by Weindling and Earley, they varied in the degree of isolation they described and the ways in which they coped with the loneliness. Derek, for example, found it very difficult, particularly at first, because he had not expected to feel it so strongly. Cathy spoke of being affected at times of particular pressure while Brian and Ed mitigated their sense of isolation by building supportive senior teams. The more experienced heads seemed to accommodate the professional isolation, supporting the findings reported by Wendling and Earley that 'those heads who felt well prepared for the demands of headship were less likely to report feelings of professional isolation' (Weindling and Earley 1987, p 121). Those who had been heads for a while knew what to expect.

This study has not provided a specific answer to the question about preparation and support. It has offered insights into the skills and qualities that appeared to be important to heads and some views about the way in which heads sustain and develop themselves. It is possible to infer from these insights that candidates for such a demanding post should be more

systematically prepared and sustained. The message from the case study heads is that such a programme should be rooted in practice and based on a holistic understanding of the complexity of the role.

Introduction to the Themes

This fifth and final chapter contains the conclusions drawn from this study of secondary headship in the context of school autonomy. This introduction includes a reminder of the issues that emerged from the survey of the literature, a brief resume of the research process and an overview of the answers to the research questions. A number of themes, which serve to illuminate aspects of headship, emerged and this chapter contains a section on each of these. The final section considers the implications of these themes in relation to the purpose of the study.

The issues for consideration that emerged from the literature survey are documented in chapter one of this study. One such issue concerned the variety of interpretations of headship and the apparent lack of a consistent definition of the post (Hall *et al* 1986). The passing of the 1986 and 1988 Acts established the basis for school autonomy and provided some definition of heads' consequent responsibility and accountability. There was evidence, from various studies of headship which were conducted after 1988, of diversity in priority and practice. Heads who were interviewed after the passing of the 1988 Act appeared to recognise the validity of external accountability although they set varying priorities and identified with different types of performance indicator (Ribbins and Marland 1994). This diversity highlighted the second issue which related to definitions of success for heads.

The position of the head as accountable for particular outcomes suggested the third issue which was the need to respond to certain constituencies – staff, students, parents and governors (MacBeath 1998). Prior to the passing of the 1986 and 1988 Acts, recommendations designed to improve preparation and support for heads had already been suggested (Weindling and Earley 1987). The level of responsibility and accountability identified by heads in the post 1988 studies (Mortimore and Mortimore 1991 and Ribbins and

Marland 1994) lent importance to the consideration of the fourth issue, the nature of preparation for and support during headship.

The approach to be adopted towards gathering data to illuminate understanding of these issues was considered in chapter two. Within this chapter the issues were defined as four research questions: What are the key features of headship? What is success in headship and how is it measured? How do heads perceive and respond to the expectations of their main audiences (staff, students, parents and governors)? What can we learn about preparation for and support during headship? The study was designed to gather qualitative data through the case study approach. The material was gathered through interviews with heads, supplemented by interviews with senior staff and reference to documents. Reports of these case studies were presented in chapter three. The data were analysed to provide material to suggest possible answers to the four questions. These were documented in chapter four.

From the evidence derived from the existing studies of headship and surveyed in chapter one, it had become apparent that headship could be viewed in two ways. On the one hand it could be seen as a series of tasks which could be linked to standards and competencies. On the other hand it could be considered to be a holistic activity which could not readily be separated into component parts. It became very clear as the data gathering and analysis for this study advanced that the evidence from this study favoured the holistic interpretation. This implied that it was not possible to keep the aspects of headship fully distinct, rather that, however they were considered, the aspects were interlinked in some way. Furthermore, the term holistic implies that the sum is more than the parts, suggesting a role that is demanding in its very nature in a way that transcends a list of different responsibilities.

This notion of headship as a holistic activity has informed the structure of this chapter. The data analysis exposed a wide range of demands placed on heads and pointed to a variety of

ways in which these demands overlapped. This view recalls some work on strategic planning in schools that was designed to allow for the apparently confused or chaotic nature of the situation (Wallace 1992) that arose when schools were being subjected to numerous imperatives to innovate. In order to enable them to accommodate turbulence, Wallace illustrated an approach to planning that relied on a series of overlapping cycles.

A similar model has been adopted in this chapter. The five themes that emerged are considered in turn in order to identify the specific points but each one is also considered in relation to other themes. Each theme overlaps and links with one or more of the other themes. For example, the increase in the scope of headship has not just affected the volume of the work of the head, it has also increased the complexity. The notion of complexity is closely bound up with the demand for continuous change leadership and management from the head. Scope and complexity have been coupled together to form the first theme. The aspect of complexity overlaps with the second theme - change leadership and management.

While the implementation of educational change can be described in straightforward organisational terms, the realisation is socially complex (Fullan 1991). One of the implications of that social complexity, according to Fullan, is the need to allow for what he calls local factors, the social conditions and settings in which people work. In this study this is termed the theme of context and its impact. The context includes the people, in particular groups such as staff and parents and these groups pose dilemmas for the heads. These dilemmas have an impact on the head's accountability in that he or she has to meet a range of potentially conflicting demands.

There follows a series of sections which consider each of the five themes in turn. Each section outlines the nature of the theme, its relationship with another theme or themes and the implications for headship. The themes are:

- 1) Scope and complexity;
- 2) Change leadership and management;
- 3) The impact of the context;
- 4) Managing dilemmas; and
- 5) The nature of the head's accountability.

1) Scope and Complexity

The data used to respond to the questions about the key features of headship highlighted both the extent of external requirements and the constant pressures to achieve changes. There were many indications from the case study heads that they were involved in a job that was increasing in scope. They talked of a wide range of responsibilities varying from buildings and finance to staff performance and examination results. They also suggested that they were still involved in the activities traditionally associated with heads. These included both day to day work in school and participating in special occasions. The level of work entailed in running a school in the context of autonomy and responsibility was considered too demanding and extensive to be undertaken by the head alone. The development of the senior staff into a team that would share the work was of itself a major area of additional work.

The study demonstrated the fact that the scope of the role had increased greatly from the time when there was no standard definition of the job of the head (Hall *et al* 1986). The sources of this increased scope were in the first instance a series of legislative measures including the delegation of financial management and associated responsibilities, the publication of examination results and the arrangements for managing staff performance.

These responsibilities created other responsibilities through the process of responding to them. The example of the development of senior teams has already been identified. Other examples include all the matters associated with planning and agreeing improvements to school buildings and managing public relations under the conditions created by the introduction of market forces into the process of educational management (Grace 1995). The role of the head, according to the results of this study, was becoming more entrepreneurial as suggested by Grace, and incorporated a host of defined responsibilities, in contrast to the position of the heads who figured in the study by Hall *et al* (1986). Since this all appeared to be in addition to the traditional expectations of the head the role seemed to be the subject of a process of ongoing accumulation. To summarise: the traditional role was still there; new responsibilities were added; and each new responsibility created a further layer of significant activity for which the head was also responsible.

This increase in demands on headteachers was to some extent reflected in the interviews with heads that are recorded in two studies carried out after the passing of the 1988 Act. The heads interviewed by Mortimore and Mortimore (1991) and Ribbins and Marland (1994) talked both of the volume of work and of the number of recent changes to which they had to respond. While these studies provided a sense of this process of accumulation in terms of workload they did not predict the implications for the role. Jirasinge and Lyons (1996, p 2) referred to 'a more complex job'. The study by Jirasinge and Lyons then goes on to consider a scenario where this complexity can be defined in terms of discrete elements. The data from this study,

in the other hand, suggests that that the kind of complexity that had resulted from the process of accumulation could not be so easily delineated.

The responses from the case study heads highlighted the fact that the job could not be presented as a list of tasks, although their day to day working lives consisted of moving through a series of activities. The activities could well be contributing simultaneously to the discharging of different responsibilities. For example, a single discussion with a senior member of staff could well be concerned with an aspect of forward planning designed to improve student motivation, the performance of that member of staff in relation to the development of the whole senior team and the specific organisation of a school event. The combination of pressure of time and the links between the school's examination results, the performance of the staff and the effectiveness of day to day organisation meant that heads were often trying to achieve several objectives at once.

The daily routine involved a variety of activities including paperwork, coming to terms with many technical matters, especially relating to buildings and finance, chairing a range of meetings, monitoring and intervening in the curriculum and dealing with a host of people issues. The other source of complexity, in addition to the range of objectives that could be attached to one activity, was this diversity. The heads who featured in the study of 'Headteachers at Work' (Hall *et al* 1986) appeared in the main to be able to concentrate on the activities with which they felt most at ease or were most familiar. Where they encountered diversity it appeared to be at the ordinary day to day level. They were, of course working in the pre 1988 context where the legal responsibility for many of the larger decisions was with the Local Education Authority. The case study heads were dealing with the very different types of responsibility that led to the wide assortment of activities listed earlier. Planning a new building or dealing with the process of school amalgamation is different from taking assembly or seeing a student who is wearing the wrong uniform. While there has always been

variety in headship, the variation between the elements of the job was now very great, according to the experiences of the case study heads, making for a complex role.

Wallace and Hall (1994) studied the manner in which the development of senior management teams was a response to the increase in the scope and complexity of the demands placed on the heads. Their study highlights the potential for conflict between the head's need to share the responsibility for meeting these demands and the fact that the ultimate accountability lies solely with the head. The heads talked in this study at length about their dealings with staff, particularly senior staff, demonstrating both their recognition of the need to be able to rely on senior staff and some of the resulting dilemmas. These are considered under theme number four - managing dilemmas. Senior staff who were interviewed recognised this to varying degrees. Given the importance of senior management teams as illustrated by Wallace and Hall (1994) in managing the complexity of school leadership, it is interesting to note the extent to which this was or was not recognised by the senior staff in the case study schools.

Cathy's deputy recognised the relationship between the improvement in the school and the early work on the senior management team. Brian's deputies talked of their strategic roles as being only partly realised in practice. Not all senior staff spoke with such understanding. Complex work with staff was not always shared with senior staff, for a variety of reasons. In Andrea's case a senior teacher's performance was the problem. Derek's senior staff could not be persuaded to adopt the team ethos required to meet the complexity. While the experience of the case study heads provides illustrations of the complexity of the role it also indicates that heads are still developing and seeking solutions to the inevitable challenges that result.

2) Change Leadership and Management

In part the complexity was becoming a permanent feature of the role and in part its impact was exacerbated by the fact that heads were responding to a continuous external agenda for change (Day *et al* 2000). Educational change has been described as 'planning and co-ordinating a multilevel social process involving thousands of people' (Fullan 1992). Leading and managing the change process figured strongly as a key feature of headship. There was an assumption on the part of all the case study heads that a new head was appointed to bring about changes. The individuals reflected different change agendas in their different schools. The timespan covered by the study and the use of a revisit as part of the data gathering process demonstrated that heads embarked on further cycles of change in response to constantly evolving demands. This marked a difference from an earlier study (Weindling and Earley 1987) which indicated that established heads were less likely to be involved in change than new heads and reflects the new circumstances post 1988 and the impact of turbulence and increased delegation.

The imperative to be involved in continuous change leadership was the result of a number of factors. In order to be successful, heads were responding to a whole range of requirements. The external imperatives, the outcomes of many of which were measured by specific performance indicators, were varied and subject to ongoing modification. Annual target setting in relation to examination and test results suggested that continuous school improvement was expected and the notion of perpetual improvement, as far as the case study heads were concerned, meant ongoing change. In terms of the head's key audiences - staff, students, parents and governors - perceptions of change informed some of the dynamics of the relationships.

The arrival of a new head was said to generate staff expectations that things would change. Some staff were apprehensive of what the head might do, others looked forward to what the head would change. Each head spoke of their expectations of the ways in which they expected

staff to change, both individually and collectively. In each case there was a different extent to which the head had to work with a discrepancy between their expectations and those of the staff. Students were generally presented as more conservative than staff. They did not appear to want a new head who would change things even if it was to their advantage because they found the prospect of any change unsettling, according to the heads. However, they accepted the new head in time. Effecting cultural change within the student body was described as more difficult. Students were able to adapt to changes in their circumstances but the heads made clear that changing students' expectations of themselves was much more difficult and took time.

Some of the stormier conflicts generated by the heads' changes were with parents. Some parents looked to a new head to make changes that would raise standards and responded positively to the need to play their part. Other parents had to be persuaded while some were openly antagonistic or indifferent. Much of this related to the history and context of the school. For example, it appeared that the parents of students at both Derek's and Andrea's schools were not used to playing a part in their children's education.

Governing bodies generally expected new heads to make changes. The exception in this study was Fiona's appointment. It seemed to her that the governors had other priorities which included being involved in the life of the school, and so she had to persuade them of the need to make changes. In each of the case study schools the heads talked of how they worked on the development of a partnership with the governors so as to elicit their support for changes and ensure that they appreciated some of the difficulties involved. Cathy talked of persuading governors of the fact that improvements in examination results take time to achieve. The perpetual demand for change was an additional burden for governors, however, and finding the best way of informing and involving governors in change was a problem for more than one case study head.

Heads talked of the need to analyse the school's needs and to keep re-appraising progress so as to plan the next change sequence. In addition to these personal abilities, the constant change agenda placed particular demands on the school which each head had to lead and manage. The two pressures on the school could be described as the pressure to increase and sustain momentum and the inevitability of intensification of effort. Any plan to bring about change includes timescales and the process of working to bring about change in the case study schools included the pressure of keeping to many tight deadlines because heads felt that there was not much time to achieve the changes. The change agenda lent an urgency to the other work in the school. An example was Andrea's decision to opt for a confrontation with a senior manager following his apparent unwillingness to meet requirements.

The intensification of work affected the work with middle managers in particular. While heads in Grace's study (1995) suggested that the focus for curriculum development would move to Heads of Department, it became evident during the course of this study that a considerable measure of the responsibility for examination success now lay with middle managers like Heads of Departments. They were directly accountable for contributing to that school's success against external performance indicators.

3) The Impact of the Context

The leadership and management of change in each school depended on the human beings in that school. Each head was, therefore, leading and managing change within a particular local context which included the personnel available and the conditions in which they had to work. Understanding the context implies a comprehension of that which has gone before and comes after - implying a variety of historical and cultural factors. The word context also conveys the sense of the prevailing surrounding circumstances which when applied to a school could include the socio- economic conditions in the catchment area. Equally the context could apply to the nationally constructed conditions applied to the running of schools and the relevant broader social and economic trends.

The overriding feature of the national context is the accountability of the headteacher to government prescribed expectations. This accountability can be seen as having four component parts: the impact of the market; the effect of decentralisation; professional responses and requirements; and the need to take management approaches (Leithwood 2001). A link can be made between the national and the local context in that 'leadership needs to be understood in terms of the complex interplay of the personal/biographical, the institutional/organisational, and the broader social, political and economic context.' (Christie and Lingard 2001, p 17). This quotation defines three broad definitions of context for the leader's work as: the national scene in terms of expectations and pressures; the characteristics of the individual institution; and the way the individual leader works.

The national scene for the head include the requirement to take what are termed management approaches, much of which has been covered under the headings of complexity and the leadership and management of change. One particular aspect is maintaining the balance between what are traditionally called educational activities and what might be termed

management activities. This poses a dilemma that resembles the previously discussed challenge of coping with the general accumulation of work and responsibilities. The case study heads recognised the process of weighing the involvement in leading teaching and learning through working with teachers and being in the classroom against the need to secure the resources and accommodation to support that activity. Additionally, the head had to balance against the former the need to resolve any problems that were impinging on success in teaching and learning. The question of resolving dilemmas as part of headship is revisited later in this chapter.

Another aspect of the national context was the application of market forces to the education service. This was intended to make schools more directly accountable to parents by giving them the right to choose a school for their child. In practice this led to different outcomes in different places (Grace 1995) and the impact on the case study heads is considered as part of the effect of local conditions (Fullan 1992). The other features of the nationally determined context were professional expectations and the effects of decentralisation. The former related particularly to the requirement to lead and manage staff which has been considered particularly in relation to change and will be revisited as part of the consideration of dilemmas for heads. Decentralisation, or delegation of power and responsibility, will be revisited in the section on the theme of accountability.

The case studies make clear the different local circumstances of each of the schools and the various modes of operation of the six heads. The circumstances included: the socio-economic nature of the area served by the school; the recent history of the school; the balance of need and ability in the intake; and the local educational circumstances including the number of Grant Maintained (later Foundation) schools, the size and financial health of the LEA and the relationship between the LEA and its schools. Studying the schools underlined that it was

harder to reach the externally specified standards in areas of socio-economic deprivation.

This was confirmed in the relevant Ofsted reports.

Schools in areas of greater need had higher numbers of students with special needs and greater difficulties with attendance. Within the six schools two were in areas of some deprivation, two were served areas with a mixture of deprivation and modest affluence. One other was in a privileged area while another was in an area with a good average intake. The challenges and opportunities for the heads appeared to vary accordingly. For example, it seemed to be possible to make considerable progress against the indicators in the schools serving areas with a social and economic mix, but that progress always seemed to be vulnerable. Progress was described as much slower and harder to achieve in the more deprived areas. There was a subtle difference between the two schools serving the more deprived areas, however. One had very high levels of families in need as measured against national norms and illustrated by the data in the Ofsted reports. The other school served the area which was, relatively speaking, the most deprived in the town but not so badly off in relation to national measures of need. While the school performance measures in both cases did reflect that difference, there appeared to be a stronger sense of struggling against the odds in the higher performing school, reflected in the frustration expressed by the head and deputy. This could be attributed to feeling that despite the progress the school made, it still lagged behind the other local schools.

In terms of the effect of local conditions therefore, it is certainly the case, on the basis of this study, that the nature of the local community plays a significant part in defining the way the head works. In this study this meant putting much more emphasis on trying to work with some difficult parents and endeavouring to boost student self esteem and aspiration. It also created a sense of continually battling against the odds. The nature of this impact of the local context on the work of the heads would bear further examination. The history of the school

also has an effect. Heads were dealing with the impact of the work of their predecessors, with the place of the school in the local 'pecking order', with the condition of the buildings and the background to the planning of school places. Andrea faced opportunities and great challenges both in order to keep her school open and then to manage the amalgamation with another local school.

The other feature of the local circumstances of the head's work was the set of personal characteristics that he/she was able to bring to bear to help meet the challenges of the job. The quality that was stressed strongly by Cathy and Derek was confidence. Cathy attributed her success to her own unshakeable confidence in the fact that the strategies she was employing would work, that her judgement was sound and that she was sufficiently open and personally secure to take advice from others and put things right when they went wrong. Her confidence allowed her other characteristics to flourish. These included clarity of thought and efficiency of planning and organising. Derek realised that he needed more confidence, referring to the level of confidence needed as arrogance. His faltering confidence at times, by his own admission, restricted the momentum for change. Brian and Ed both referred to the need to be able to adapt to a range of demands and types of people and situations. They saw this as important in their schools. Andrea adopted what she termed the Chief Executive approach, matching her outgoing and business-like approach with the need for the school to be much more involved in its community. These examples illustrate the relationship between the head's personal strengths and the local needs.

4) Dilemmas

The complexity and range of requirements and pressures that the case study heads were endeavouring to respond to were bound to create situations that were not easily resolved in full. An example would be the cost to the budget of paying a member of staff on a protected

salary rather than trying to dispense with his or her services altogether. Andrea talked of how the senior teacher was effective in a more junior role and that it was not an ideal situation in budget terms but the extra cost was less damaging than attempting to get rid of him. Many of the dilemmas that were a feature of the work of these heads related to people. They arose frequently because of the extent to which external demands were defined without any reference to individual circumstances, including the capacities of the people. Heads were constantly balancing the change and improvement agendas against the capacities of staff and students to realise those demands.

This balancing act which resulted from the number of dilemmas to be resolved is another theme relevant to headship in the current context. The section in chapter four which examined the expectations of staff, students, parents and governors, illustrated the need to balance maintenance against development (Day *et al* 2000) or stability against change. There is, by implication, a whole series of dilemmas within this one statement of juxtaposition. A dilemma is the process of deciding between alternative courses of action, neither of which is supported by clear external validation.

An example would be balancing the imperative to improve examination results and the need to meet the learning needs of the staff and students. While there could be long term congruence between the two, in the short term they could conflict. For example, coaching a targeted group of students through a particular examination might improve the school's performance record for that year. It could take the resources that would otherwise be devoted to investing in improving literacy and learning skills longer term. The same could apply to investing in staff training. The case study heads were committed to long term improvement. Andrea talked of the difficulty of waiting for evidence of improvement, while Brian and Cathy stressed how vulnerable progress was. While these heads resolved the dilemma by investing in the longer term outcomes, their success was not assured.

Equally, the perpetual succession of new government demands may well require more change than the school can cope with and therefore put the basic performance at risk. The head has to balance the compulsion against the potential damage and endeavour to find a solution. One example that featured in the study was the introduction of the performance threshold at short notice and the immediate impact on the heads' workload.

The other dilemma that was particularly featured in the fourth chapter was the balance between involving the staff in decisions and telling them what was to be done because it would waste their time to seek their views on something that was largely externally specified. Again, this dilemma illustrates a number of balancing judgements for the head to make. It is often the case that, in the context of many national mandates, there is very little room for manoeuvre. Sometimes, therefore, it is best not to waste people's time when there is really nothing to discuss.

However, as Cathy indicated, the act of being involved can have other benefits, for example, making people feel part of the organisation and valued for their contribution. As Ed illustrated, the use of a standard consultation process ensured that people could not justifiably say that they had not had a chance. The process of consultation also acted as an opportunity to give out information. However, there was always the danger of disguising the distribution of information as consultation, leading to disillusionment. Furthermore, if there were really no options it was risky to waste people's time, particularly when there were so many other pressures. The case study heads, in different ways, were looking for a balance between involvement in decision making combined with the understanding of the issues and avoiding either wasting people's time or creating unrealistic expectations.

The other group of dilemmas for heads was the management of their workload and the identification of priorities. The dilemmas arose from the accumulation of more and more

layers of responsibility so that each head was constantly having to decide on a manageable number of priorities from a mass of expectations. This process was not only difficult for the heads at times since they were not able to respond to everyone's needs as they would ideally like, it also affected senior staff. They had to share the head's priorities since their work was dominated by the responsibilities delegated by the head. The effective teams worked together on the priorities but it was the head's responsibility to make sure that the team's priorities were on the right track. This process was also vulnerable to being thrown off course either by urgent government or Local Authority edicts or by events, like a significant staff absence or a major incident. Holding on to the priorities in this situation presented new dilemmas and required a further act of balancing conflicting demands.

The tensions created by the need to resolve dilemmas gave all the case study heads a sense that at best things were always a little uncertain and a best that they were turbulent and unpredictable. Strategies for meeting their most significant accountabilities had to be both constant and flexible. Learning how to develop these strategies was not something that had formed part of the preparation for headship but had been learnt while in post. The analysis offered by Day *et al* (2000) provided a structure which proved helpful in understanding this aspect of headship.

5) The Nature of the Head's Accountability

The formal structure of accountability for heads was introduced through the 1986 and 1988 Acts. The former established the basis of a job description and the appraisal process. The latter specified what should be taught accompanied by the means of assessment and introduced the dimension of market forces through per pupil funding and more open enrolment. There already existed an informal notion of accountability in that the head was perceived by all, in a non specific way, as responsible for everything in the school. This

responsibility was shared in practice so that the class teacher, the caretaker and the secretary played their part from day to day. However, this informal set of assumptions was likely to be interpreted differently by all involved, including the head. The processes of carrying out Ofsted inspections and developing performance management have been designed to try to sharpen the business of accountability with the intention of raising standards within the service.

The case study heads acknowledged the wide ranging nature of their accountability. The areas mentioned incorporated: student and staff performance, including examination results; school image and student recruitment; resource management including staffing, site and finance; ensuring legal requirements were met; and providing a professional lead. The characteristics of the post 1988 period were the increasing degree of specificity in relation to expectations of heads, the transfer of responsibility from Local Education Authorities to schools and the complexity that resulted from the range of requirements and the pace of change.

During the post 1988 period there was also a heightening of the expectations of schools and heads resulting in part from intensifying the competition for students, for survival and for a more favourable position in the league tables. The only case study head who did not appear to be immediately affected in her current school was Fiona. She had been very much affected by the level of competition in her previous headship and thought that, in her new school, the staff and governors should be more concerned that they were. The case study heads did not spend time bemoaning the position of their school even if they did not see the system as fair to them. Rather they concerned themselves with the complexity of the accountability situation. They saw that their job was to grasp the complexity and clarify it for staff and then do all they could to make the individuals accountable for their part in the whole. The vision of the school that they described for the staff was a blend of their beliefs about education, the national

requirements and local constraints. They saw it as their role to enable people to be accountable by making sense of the situation for them.

The local constraints included another form of accountability to set alongside the national indicators, namely what staff, students, parents and governors expected of the head. The head's function was to be aware of these and to judge how far they could or should be met. The head also had to work with those groups to endeavour to help them to understand their various accountabilities and obligations and to have reasonable expectations of the head.

Ed was concerned that governors might not understand the nature of school improvement and start to apply what he called 'the football manager syndrome' as soon as things did not go according to plan. When it came to staff there was a balance to be established between allowing them sufficient scope and freedom of action so that they took full responsibility for outcomes, actively seeking solutions to problems, while avoiding leaving them the flexibility to decide not to meet external objectives. This act of judgement included balancing a position between delegating in a meaningful way and retaining sufficient contact with the work in order to exercise ultimate responsibility. This constituted a particular challenge for heads when they delegated important responsibilities to senior managers (Wallace and Hall 1994).

As the early literature on headship illustrated, since heads have always been perceived as powerful, there has always been a view that the head was responsible for what went on at the school. In the context of increased school autonomy the sharing of that responsibility with the Local Education Authority has largely disappeared. In addition, the specific outcomes for which the head is accountable have, over time, become much more prescribed. The feedback from the case studies reflects stages in the process of coming to terms with this relatively strict accountability.

The literature that was studied within the scope of this study was chosen for the focus on the work of the headteacher. One of the implications of the level of explicitly defined external accountability is the potential for tension between the head and the governing body. The accountability for the quality of the school's performance is a shared one. There is some exploration of the difficulties that can arise as a result in MacBeath (1998), although generally relationships were said to be good so long as they were actively managed. This picture was similar to the one portrayed by heads in this study. However, as the expectations of heads, school and governors continue to attract government interest and action, the impact on heads of increasing accountability is likely to become more complex and pose more dilemmas.

Some Observations

The explanation of each of the five themes has demonstrated the demanding nature of headship in the post 1988 context and illustrated the way in which the aspects are interrelated. While it is possible to consider them individually, that consideration has to be done in a way that recognises the way each aspect overlaps and links with other aspects. The five themes: scope and complexity; change leadership and management; the impact of the context; managing dilemmas; and the nature of the head's accountability provide a model for considering the role and expectations of the head. The themes also enable the involved nature of the relationships between the head and key groups to be examined. They also indicate the advanced nature of the required skills and experience in order to succeed in the role.

This study has brought together and explored themes that were present in studies that were surveyed in chapter one. The scope of the head's role was highlighted by Hughes (1985) when he introduced the distinction between the Chief Executive and Leading Professional. In showing how these functions overlapped, Hughes also pointed out the complexity of the role. The post 1988 context has intensified the potential tensions indicated by this identification of

two very different functions within one role. Grace (1995) commented on the way in which the introduction of the idea of the market into school leadership was both highlighting different interpretations of the role on the part of heads and also adding the concept of the entrepreneurial leader to existing ideas about headship.

Many of the post 1988 studies were about heads and changes. They implied that responding to and managing and leading change were part of headship but the researchers were more interested in the impact of the actual changes than the process of change leadership itself. Weindling and Earley (1987), in their study of the early years of headship gave some detailed consideration to the management of change. MacBeath (1998) and Day *et al* (2000) incorporated theories of change leadership into their work. This study, on the other hand, highlights the leadership and management of change as fundamental to headship.

The post 1988 studies of headship from the heads' viewpoint did not devote a considerable amount of space and time to the context in which the head worked. They did consider the national requirements but did not examine the local conditions in which they had to be met. Mortimore and Mortimore (1991) did include some of the local challenges faced by their subject heads. The evidence from the case study heads indicates that the local context has an impact that cannot be ignored.

The notion of understanding leadership in terms of solving dilemmas has been studied by a number of commentators and is explored at length by Day *et al* (2000) and is also considered by MacBeath (1998). Given the scope and complexity of headship, the constant pressure for change and the potential for tension between local capacity and national demand, the impact of dilemmas on the work of the head would merit further exploration and examination.

Equally, accountability is a theme that is mentioned in the studies surveyed in chapter one

rather than studied in detail. It is referred to emphatically by some of the heads in the study by Ribbins and Marland (1994) but not developed by the researchers.

Conclusions

The implications of this study are that the five themes provide a powerful way of considering and understanding headship. They are present in the other studies surveyed in the literature survey but not developed. Nor are they developed fully in this study. There are several reasons for this. The original intention was to understand the changing nature of secondary headship and, as has already been emphasised, the study was designed to be exploratory. The resources available to the researcher were limited, as explained in chapter two, and therefore the project was constrained. The scope of the work was deliberately limited to ensure that it was manageable which inevitably resulted in a restricted range of data sources and a small number of case study heads. The focus was primarily, but not exclusively, on data from heads and so the study is dominated by the management perspective. In addition, the case study method, while providing the opportunity to explore the experiences of individuals in depth, tends to limit the scope for generalising the conclusions. Finally, as a head herself, the researcher was something of a professional insider which could be seen as a limitation on the objectivity with which the themes might be developed.

The study does also possess a number of strengths which reinforce the value of the findings. These include: the large quantity of data gathered; the richness and variety of these data; the fresh and authentic nature of the material from the subject heads; the range of voices heard through the project; the contrasting experiences of the individual heads even in a small sample; and the consistent application of the analysis which allowed the themes to emerge.

The evidence from this study, therefore, combined with the insights from the literature, is sufficient to suggest that these themes provide a possible way of making sense of a demanding and constantly changing role. The experience of the researcher, as gained during

twelve years of headship, bears out the complexity and increase in level of demand. The themes that emerged from the study have given form and substance to this perception.

Preparation for this role should, therefore, start from this recognition of the holistic and complex nature of headship. The link between job description, job context and personal abilities is posed by one of the models cited in the work of Jirasinge and Lyons (1996). This model, while allowing for some element of complexity, does not recognise the fact that the stated job description does not communicate the nature of the role and the demands. The view that the case study heads adopted was that experience of the actual work was essential preparation and that a qualification and other forms of training helped with understanding the experience and the job. They emphasised that a vital starting point, however, was an understanding of the overall nature of headship and the kinds of skills and qualities required. The latter are described in more detail in chapter four but include intellectual and emotional capacities that enable the head to grasp complexities rapidly and to cope with many difficult personal demands. Cave and Wilkinson (1991) refer to generic cognitive abilities alongside the relevant skills and knowledge.

The five themes outlined in this concluding chapter have implications for understanding headship, researching headship, preparing for and sustaining headship. They provide both a basis for further research and a potential framework for informing and developing practice. They have all individually been explored to some extent, continue to be explored by other researchers, and appear in some training programmes, for example 'Leading change - developing effective leadership teams' (Earley and Evans 2002). There would, however, be real benefit in undertaking further study on both their inter-related quality and their impact individually on the nature of secondary headship in the context of school autonomy.

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